George Toles

Auditioning Betty in *Mulholland Drive*

The ingénue arrives at the audition.

> Anything that is not anonymous is all a dream.
>
> —William Maxwell, *The Chateau*

> Early on I learned to disguise myself in words, which were really clouds.
>
> —Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*

Among the many riches beckoning to us, like a mirage, in the dream kingdom of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*—where we seem always poised between a bewitchingly full and an equally bewitching empty experience—is a master-key to the mystery of star acting in movies. I know of no film that provides a more comprehensive demonstration of how a star performance works, and how it achieves its boundary-shattering control over us.

Most of the revelations about star acting are concentrated in one astonishing segment: Betty's audition scene, which occurs in the course of the long day and night in which Betty dematerializes. On the one hand, Lynch slowly reveals to us a deluded, modestly talented, aspiring actress failing to achieve more than a stand-in status in her own life. Only in the private screening rooms of the actress's fantasy and dream life, we eventually determine, is there any hope of escape for her, but even there she can never escape the trap of performance. On the other hand, in the course of the pivotal audition scene Lynch manages to show us, just as our skepticism about "all things Hollywood" has reached fever pitch, what the power of performance can make happen: how it can swiftly confer a sense of identity and a groundedness that have sphinx-like credibility. A young woman who could barely be described as real becomes, through acting alchemy, a figure whose hold on life and on her turbulent inner forces seems stronger, more fraught with consequence than our own—at least for the length of a "try-out." We would be hard pressed to say exactly to what we are assenting, or what warrants our shift to a believer's vulnerable faith. We believe without knowing, or needing to ascertain, what it is that an irresistible performance is asking us to sanction. Moreover, we find ourselves capitulating (like moviegoers in childhood)

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to everything we see and hear immediately after receiving elaborate assurance, within the hideously false context of an ill-managed Hollywood audition, that there is no possible basis for belief of any kind.

Once Betty's audition ends, and she emerges from what might justly be termed a kind of possession, or performer's trance, we viewers may well experience a shrugging or shaking off of a kindred enchantment—our too deep immersion in the belief engendered by make-believe. We can rouse ourselves from a strange interlude of belief, or *awaken* from it, and in the slightly groggy aftermath wonder whether belief is really the right word to apply to an embarrassingly full involvement. This reflex renunciation of the credulous mood we were in a minute ago is similar to our disavowal of a curiously intense dream experience once we are restored to daylight, followed, more often than not, by a swift disintegration of the dream details in our memory. I reassure myself that an experience was "just a dream," as though that settled the question of my helpless enthrallment to its reality while the dream was still in progress. Such enthrallment is obviously sustained by a total, innocent acceptance of whatever happens as happening "for keeps," however absurd or overblown the events appear to us in retrospect.

Before Betty's audition scene, we are granted a full advance look at the script she must perform, and her confused amateur's approach to it in a dry run of the scene played with Rita, her non-actress roommate. The scene Betty must try to bring to life is manifestly hollow; every line of dialogue seems unworthy of a genuine actress's commitment. The dialogue is overexplicit, repetitive, and information-clogged, denying any recourse to an inner life. As for the actress who is earnestly laboring to make the scene play in rehearsal, she seems hardly more realized or humanly credible in her own right than the character she seeks to inhabit. At this point in the film, she seems at one with her improbable name, the flimsy comic-book moniker, "Betty." "Betty" is a character so entrenched in naïveté and the hokey paraphernalia of small-townness that her whole confected being is a hymn to unreality. The viewer is discouraged from imagining her life history as anything more than an amusing pastiche of stale movie conventions. She is a plastic newcomer to big-city ways (like Pamela Tiffin in the embalmed 1960s remake of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair)*. From Betty's first appearance, she is armored in a niceness that keeps her virtually untouched by the confounding, fearsome events taking place around her. She leads a vacantly charmed life, floating into the movie as a beaming ghostly apparition at a jitterbug contest, and continuing to float in her subsequent more substantial appearances on escalators at the L.A. airport or in her tour of her "borrowed" apartment. One quickly learns to watch Betty's responses to situations with the confidence that cheerful puzzlement and pluck will invariably be the dominant notes. On a few occasions, something darker creeps almost imperceptibly into her expression for a moment, but the viewer is not expected to catch these tiny shifts. We are held by our first, forceful impression of her: intractable sunniness.

Naomi Watts, who plays Betty, is remarkably adept at finding fresh ways to rearrange the sugar packets of Betty's concerns. Watts is sincerely (as opposed to condescendingly) engaged with her character's buoyancy and shadow-free conviviality—without needing to hide the fact that Betty is disconnected from any world larger than her movie-defined "hopes." Naomi Watts was known to film audiences prior to *Mulholland Drive,* if at all, as a competent "background player" (one whose job was to blend in rather than stand out). For that reason, Betty cannot draw extra definition and weight from our familiarity with an already established

Betty (Naomi Watts) rehearses with bathrobe and butter knife.

Watts persona. Lynch makes it difficult, in other words, for us to see around Betty, and thus gauge the separate reality of the actress who endows her with an appearance and a voice.

It is fair to say then that nothing in either Betty or in Naomi Watts' unself-conscious (to the point of seeming un-self-aware) way of depicting her puts the character at odds with the two-dimensional audition scene apparatus she confronts when unctuous movie producer Wally leads her into his office. We see a nervous, smiling young woman, almost certainly out of her depth even in this emphatically shallow Hollywood setting, being introduced to an assemblage of mostly interchangeable personnel who have some connection to a low-budget movie that Betty has been invited (as a courtesy to her aunt) to read for. Though *Mulholland Drive* has challenged us with many bewildering, pathless, teasingly thorny episodes prior to the audition scene, we are encouraged to feel more securely placed and confident about what is going on at this narrative juncture than perhaps at any previous point in the film. We link the audition scene with the many previous glimpses of "insider" movie culture that Lynch has offered us, all of which share a quasi-satiric tone. The behavior of the people in the audition room as they are hastily presented to Betty increases our conviction that they have no serious claim on our attention. They are industry stereotypes, designed for service in a comedy sketch. We understand them at first glance: the Producer, dispensing dried-out blarney; the pretentious fool of a Director, sporting a dismally unflattering Errol Flynn mustache, who tries to sound knowledgable and fails at every turn; crisp, polite, but visibly skeptical and bored Casting Agents; and a sybaritic Leading Man, who has spent too much time in the sun and in throwaway TV movies, and whose face resembles a grinning catcher's mitt. The names attached to these nondescript professionals in the fatuous round of introductions refuse somehow to stick to their putative owners. The perky unreality of Betty's name is like a virus communicating a kindred improbability to the many names exchanged (or floated) in her presence: Woody, Bob, Wally, Jack, Lynnie James, Chuck.

Our already established suspicion that the script for the intended movie is nonsensical easily leads to the judgment that the material has found just the right group of people to ensure that its mediocrity will be respected—in fact, vigilantly protected on all sides. The atmosphere is thick with satiric signals that there is no place for art in this gathering, and that if art entered by accident, it would go unrecognized. The vocabulary of fraudulence that defines—and binds together—this club of seasoned hacks is an instant corrosive to any lively intuition or flash of inspiration. If we were asked to predict the outcome of Betty's audition early in the scene, my guess is that most viewers would envision (perhaps even wish for) a disastrous comic deflation of poor Betty's hopes. There is potential for ugliness in Betty's humiliation, since she has no experience with Hollywood guile, or its familiar sidekick, casual brutality. Though Betty is strictly a B-movie creation herself, both in her innocence and star-struck yearning, Lynch has alerted us (here and in his other films) that he is able to reduce even plastic ingénues to spasms of compelling woe. For Lynch, the fact of a character's conspicuous fabrication is no safeguard against real hurt. He often reserves his greatest torments for those most deeply enfolded in artifice, as though the artificial (in its nearness to dream) were the natural seedbed for trauma.

The possibility that no one viewing this film for the first time could foresee is that the audition would be electrifying in an unsatiric, unironic manner—in other words, a legitimate triumph. Even if Betty is able to persuade the unqualified observers sleepily spread about the studio office that she has an appealing freshness or the "right look," we assume that she cannot rise above her own cleverly molded limitations to escape the flatness of Betty's emotional life. She "wants the part," to be sure, with the foursquare eagerness of many a daydreaming neophyte, but she has no resources, no audacity to bring to the task of revealing herself to the camera. Further, the role itself seems built for the express purpose of thwarting truthful exploration.

The actors—Betty and her offhandedly lecherous assigned partner, Woody, who looms over her—are given almost no space in which to play the scene. They begin in the most awkward position imaginable, nearly backed against a wall. Woody holds her tight and seeks openings for permissible groping as he prepares to repeat, for the twentieth time, in a smooth, automatic fashion, the dull lines he has long since grown weary of. The director, Bob, intervenes just before the audition gets underway with some advice that is neither intelligible nor capable of being clarified. Bob cautions Betty that the audition (and the scene itself) should not be regarded as a contest. A contest, of course, is precisely what an audition is, and the only clear thing in the script pages Betty has worked on is that a power struggle (another contest) is taking place. Bob goes on to set up the characters as incommunicado monoliths: "the two of them . . . with themselves." He concludes with the injunction that they not "play it for real, until it gets real." This would imply that the roomful of list-

Above: Betty is introduced to a cramped room of Hollywood professionals.

Right: Betty and Woody play it "nice and close."

less spectators has all the time in the world for the performers to consult the temperature of their emotions "in private." Betty and Woody should hold off on interacting until they are fully convinced that reality, unvarnished and incontestable, underwrites their relationship. Woody, as confused as Betty, gallantly (as he sees it) takes up her cause, attempting to relieve her embarrassment with an old pro's directness and simplicity. He decides to "make it real" for her by playing it "nice and close," pressing her against him with the wall as backup. To compound Betty's worries, he declares his intention to duplicate the strategy he employed in an earlier, no doubt memorable audition with another actress ("the girl with black hair"). Betty, having not been present for the black-haired rival's reading, and having no clue about what made her approach intriguing, is promptly reduced to the status of body double for an absent (still vividly recalled) predecessor. Woody is dusting off a performance that once had a spark of life in the moment of playing, and enjoins Betty to revive the "ghost" of her unseen competitor so he can reenact his own good bits. Bob again intervenes, apparently delighted to be reminded of the audition in question. He urges Woody to remember "this time" not to rush the line "Before what?" as though Woody were the actor trying out and the one to whom Bob planned to pay attention. At the moment when all the hokum and degrading absurdity of the moviemaking process have been stripped bare and savagely mocked, Woody launches Betty into the scene with the courtly blandishment that they're going to play it "just like in the movies."

And into the movies we go, but as I've already noted, not at all in the manner that we could anticipate. Betty has come to the audition space dressed in a gray suit, which is clearly meant to evoke forceful memories of the famous gray suit worn by Kim Novak in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. In that film, Novak's initially hidden primary character, Judy Barton, wears the suit when she is impersonating the wandering, tragically innocent, lost-to-memory, and romantically possessed Madeline Elster.[1] Betty removes her gray jacket in order to perform more freely (gray gives way to her sky-blue blouse), divesting herself, it would seem, of a layer of formality. The *Vertigo* connection cues us to be on the lookout for a second Betty identity, one somehow at variance with the first—less assured, perhaps, or less shielded from whatever trouble the situation is clearly preparing for her.

When Lynch selects a medium-shot vantage point to frame Betty's audition (one that allows actors and space, finally in proper attunement, to blend properly), he is subtly displacing "Bob" as the directorial presence. Until this subtle transfer of directorial authority, the whole office space had felt disproportionate and off-kilter as a cinematic setting. The room is a long rectangle, whose furnishings seem wrongly situated for comfort (much less intimacy). One is mentally driven to rearrange things, to reduce the overall clutter and sense of unnatural distance and fish-eye elongation. Even the socially maladroit spectator could come up with a more sensible seating plan: everyone in the room looks slightly out of place, either poised for quick flight or resigned to entrapment. Nothing provides a center or gathering point. The room's color scheme is arduously brown, reminding me of the insanely overdetermined burnt sienna color coordination in Gene Tierney's desert hacienda in *Leave Her to Heaven*. In

the midst of so much chocolate decor, the possibly rich wood paneling acquires an air of basement rec-room flimsiness. Lynch does not place undue emphasis on these design "mistakes." Betty's nervousness and our willingness to share her mildly hallucinatory point of view, while scouting out portents unnoticed by her in this loaded milieu, seem to justify the disagreeable, tilting congestion.

Our sense of time leading into the audition is equally disjointed. The editing takes its rhythm, a bit aimlessly, from Wally's meandering, one-by-one introduction to Betty of his production team. Wally, who means no more to us than his associates, emotionally controls the time-flow in the room as he moves Betty, in a herky-jerky manner, through an incomprehensible tangle of alien points-of-view. There is another time shift (from torpor to urgency) once the introductions have been concluded. Wally makes it known, with hammy relish, that there's to be no more dawdling; Betty must instantly shift gears and "play the scene." Though Betty is dressed as a Hitchcock heroine, the progression of images thus far is the obvious antithesis of Hitchcock lucidity and fluent, "infallible" viewer placement within an event. We are naturally inclined to link ourselves with Betty, but we have a little difficulty maintaining contact with her. She is never hidden, but neither do we have a clear emotional channel to her. I would argue that though the time within the room unfolds subjectively, it is not necessarily her subjectivity that governs it. Not until Betty speaks her first "within the script" line ("You're still here") do film space and time, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, "come into their own [within the scene] and find each other."[2] The previously inhospitable audition room and its erratic "clock" are effortlessly adjusted to the performers' advantage.

When Betty had rehearsed her audition scene with Rita in her kitchen, her entire performing strategy depended on gradually reduced physical distance from her adversary. As her character's threats intensify and her homicidal intention crystallizes, she planned to close in on her victim. Woody destroys this possibility by insisting that Betty begin to speak while caught in his bear-hug embrace. The viewer is initially apprehensive that Betty is thrown off by this switch, and has lost her bearings. We have no reason to imagine that her talent or resourcefulness will enable her to deal with unforeseen developments. It seems less a question of *whether* she will be deprived of confidence and control than *when*. Since Betty has evinced barely a trace of sexual awareness in her previous scenes—even when she chances upon naked Rita in her aunt's shower stall—we no doubt feel that she is unequipped both as a person and as an actress to fend off (or take in stride) Woody's "automatic pilot" lasciviousness. However little credence we give to Betty as a fully developed character, we can't easily avoid feeling protective of her when she is so overmatched. Woody, with his massive bulk, appears to be intimidating a small, childlike woman, who is frightened but situationally constrained from saying so. We resent the actor's pushiness and his falsely paternal arrogance.

Betty appears to be forced by the unwelcome proximity of her partner to speak her first line before she is completely ready. We also imagine her consternation at the discovery that a scene she had construed as a climactic quarrel is being treated as a love scene. All her notions about her appropriate emotional relationship to her partner are abruptly taken away from her. The authentic notes that Betty is striking in the first exchange of the audition derive from our sense that Betty is not *yet* acting: she is merely unable to conceal her agitation at what her fellow-actor is doing. She "forgets" (so we imagine) how much the audition means to her, and—with an instinctive protest born of discomfort—she pushes Woody away after he kisses her without warning, then holds him off with a suddenly firm, even imposing, outstretched arm. We are surprised, and impressed, by a degree of physical determination that we have not before now encountered in her. On the instant, her seeming frailty is backed by a steel will.

Betty holds her open hand against Woody as though she has every right to take command of the situation; she is flustered, but not apologetic. What is most remarkable here is the way that Lynch makes us uncertain of whether we are watching an actress or a character defending herself. Because we are more or less persuaded that Betty is an unimaginative, severely restricted performer, when we witness her expressing genuine turmoil in her struggle with Woody, we are likely to conclude, at first, that it is the actress who cannot manage her feelings, and who is compelled to resist him. We arrive at this conclusion before we have had time to process the thought that the behavior we assign to the actress bears virtually no relation to the "Betty construct" we have up to now been working with. The viewer is not sure if he is watching the audition scene unravel. Betty may well be making "mistakes" as her raided innocence awakens her survival instincts.

Though we aren't permitted to observe the reactions of those watching the audition, we may naturally wonder how they are interpreting what they are looking at. "Do they see what we see?" is a reasonable phrasing of our concern. Lynch encourages us to imagine

that we are one or two jumps ahead of the Hollywood dullards who are carelessly assessing Betty's performance. It is quite possible that *they* imagine that Betty is, so far, reacting to Woody "in character." The judges of this audition don't know Betty as well as we do; they perhaps interpret her squeamishness, her upset and aversion as feigned for the sake of the written scene. How long will Betty be able to extend her involuntary, but fortunate, act of deception? When will they discern that her distress is interfering with the scene's development? And when she crashes, as she soon must, will they be impressed by the raw energy that has been goaded out of her? Lynch knows that we are eager to seize on the prospect that we are being let in on something that others aren't privy to—that we are being given, at last, a peek at *Mulholland Drive*'s inside story. For that reason, we find ourselves believing, almost unreservedly, the audition scene as it begins to unfold. The fact that Betty's "real" feelings are putting her into conflict with the demands of a trite scenario—and that we are catching those feelings as they erupt, ahead of other spectators who are more readily duped by movie conventions—makes it a "smart move" to surrender to Lynch's illusion. We do so because we imagine we are doing the opposite; we are entranced by our own wariness. The viewer is sold on the audition's truth, in its early stages, because we have a stake in the tension arising from an actual person's protest against being submerged in sterile make-believe.

While all of this is going on, Lynch has surreptitiously corrected, and beautifully enhanced, the scene's color scheme. Betty's sky-blue blouse mates appetizingly with the rich, patrician blues of Woody's suit. Behind this harmonized pair, the previously overstated brown on the walls and woodwork begins to soften, and acquire an elegant sheen. The wall no longer traps Betty but quietly supports the actors, lending its own burnished solidity to theirs.

The major transition in the audition scene occurs when Woody moves in to embrace Betty a second time and she registers with a different quality of awareness the fact that his hand is hovering near her ass. It is here that Betty, as actress (and character) evolves, in a matter of seconds, into a more advanced organism. We all understand, at some level that doesn't require much reflection, that good acting involves (minimally) a mixture of pretending and believing. Our initial skepticism about Betty's ability to take on the demands of another character is that she seems to have almost no faculty for living up to her *own* character (if that means diverging from type). She does not show any signs of having begun to consider that others may imagine her—or evaluate her actions—in a decidedly different manner than she does. The resistance of other minds to her fantasy of what she is is not a question she has reckoned with, or even formulated. We might grant her a willingness to enter into the scripted sentiments assigned to her (like a child playing with dolls), but her grasp of pretending is rudimentary. She does not see how pretending can be informed by detachment, calculation, and duplicity. Her approach to pretending is akin to a young girl's announcement after a visit to her mother's clothes closet: "Look. I'm wearing your hat and fur. Isn't that funny?" We have also seen Betty's amateur experiment with "little white lies" in her attempts to assist her new friend-in-a-jam, Rita. Nevertheless, a

Betty takes control.

split of a very different kind suddenly manifests itself in the playing out of the audition scene. We behold Betty crossing over, in so many ways at once that the effect is breathtaking, from guileless pretending to majestic double-dealing.

Lynch highlights the divide by deserting, as if in secret, the playing area framed for the actors and inserting a close-up of an action below the public performing space, where urgent "under the table" business is being conducted. We observe Woody's hand grazing the rear of Betty's skirt and Betty's answering hand —with an almost autonomous sentience—making a decision about how to take charge of it: either by warding it off or inviting it closer. The hesitation of the actress about how to contend with the encroaching hand endows Betty, for the first time in the film, with a visible calculating power. She elects to control her antagonist by taking control of his hand, pressing it against herself harder than Woody had dared to. Betty's hand, still in clandestine close-up, covers his, and thereby takes possession of it. By guiding his hand to make a strong sexual claim on her, Betty makes the aptly named Woody understand that if he takes her with sufficient boldness, she will respond fully. When the audition commenced, less than a minute ago, we were chiefly concerned that Betty would be degraded by an old-hand predator in front of a group of venal L.A. buffoons who would be likely to go along with any of Woody's lewd antics. (Our conception of her as a plastic innocent briefly gave way, in the course of her suddenly *real* physical struggle with her fellow actor, to the thought that a convincingly vulnerable woman was being threatened. The depiction of abuse is viscerally disturbing, and the victim seemed to be in no position to defend herself.) Betty's acting choice to make her own sexuality part of the "game" is a thunderbolt for the viewer because, right up to the moment of choosing, her sexual nature has lain utterly dormant, folded beneath her vulcanized naïveté, so that it seemed not even available for private acknowledgment. The release of sexual awareness is offered as a heightened form of a "let's pretend" moment. All we have time to absorb, as Betty's hand makes its move and the face of the actress seems to confer with her hand tactically (looking down at this furtive ally), is that an actress is making a spontaneous choice to give the character she is portraying a strong erotic connection to her partner.

The aptitude to unleash her libido comes from out of nowhere, but once Betty consciously seizes on the impulse, her expression conveys to us that she knows exactly what to do with it. She expertly refocuses the scene so that her excitement at Woody's proximity (or conversely, her excitement over successfully manipulating him into thinking so) is the new center of interest. The actress is becoming attuned to dimensions of her role that were hitherto undreamed of—not only by her, but by the viewer. The viewer understands the well-worn convention of an anxious performer receiving sudden inspiration when "up against the wall" and then ceasing to flounder. That is the most convenient explanation to latch onto as we try to subdue our bewilderment and convert the alarming infusion of strangeness into something familiar. We may well entertain the question: "Who is using whom, at this point?" but in part we are merely relieved that Betty the actress is, against all odds, up to the demands of what is taking place. "She is more talented than I had supposed" is another convention-dictated impression that gains fleet entry into the viewer attempting to sort things out—and to find the least taxing route to restored clarity.

The delayed recognition of what is really transpiring has to do with the abruptly transformed character of the actress herself. A talented performer is indeed rising to the challenge under the most adverse circumstances, and she is making a series of magically right split-second decisions. Nevertheless, we need more time than we are given to register the fact that the woman who intuits under pressure what her role might include to enrich itself (moving well beyond the cramping straightforwardness of the script writer) is not—cannot be—Betty, as we have known her. To become the cagey, experienced professional who now confronts us, she must part company completely with the "dewdrop" Nancy Drew type that she has relied on for her entire onscreen definition. Someone new is at the controls, someone whom—we dimly sense—we know nothing about. To find out who she is, or might be, we are obliged to turn our attention to the fictional character being enacted—a figure that graduates, for the balance of the scene, to the status of primary source of meaning.

Notice how the deep soundlessness of the offscreen group of witnesses, and of the room itself, creates a "just like at the movies" effect at this interval. We are following Betty into her newfound trance of involvement, with no sense of the world's competing presence, or ability to distract her from her make-believe goal. She is alone with her partner, with the camera, and with us. As Betty leaves her ingénue persona behind, who does she become for the truth-seeking camera? What is the nature of this metamorphosis? Who is auditioning for us now? The viewer is virtually com-

mandeered into thinking about "Naomi Watts" herself—especially if we have no experience of her beyond her presentation in this film. The character that Betty is reading for, after all, has no special dramatic significance at first viewing. Prior to the audition, Watts' potential range as an actress has not been an issue that we have been given much cause to dwell on. If anything, she appears to match up almost too flawlessly with Betty's resolute blandness. Nowhere have her eyes signaled an alertness, a sensitivity, a degree of achieved inwardness greater than Betty's own. So we receive a salutary shock when we are reminded, past the halfway mark in *Mulholland Drive,* that the aspiring actress Watts has capacities for expressiveness and allure that she has been expertly holding in reserve. One is inclined to congratulate Watts for *her* handling of the audition, as we gradually catch on to the fact that "Betty" has been slipped off like the gray jacket and another, far more formidable presence stands in her place. We compare "Betty's" acting with Watts' more intense, exposed impersonation of an aroused lover and conclude, however irrationally, that Watts is a better, more accomplished artist than Betty. For a short, unhinged interval we have the impression of watching Betty expand emotionally to incorporate the larger persona of the mysterious "Watts," while simultaneously considering the possibility that Betty has sneakily, shadily kept something from us.

We speedily reverse that judgment in favor of the more sensible idea of Watts emerging in triumph from a "Betty" cocoon of her own making, and applaud her for carrying off such a brazen, instantaneous transformation. We are pleasurably struck by how thoroughly the skill of this new actress has deceived us. Yet we may lingeringly also feel, albeit hazily, that Watts is betraying Betty—both by exceeding her scant powers as an insecure amateur and by cunningly violating her innocence, shredding it beyond repair. She is somehow competing against her former self, and grabbing every available advantage in order to trounce her. She is free to mock, because the audition scene allows it, every last outcropping of timorousness in her personality, including that schoolgirl variety exemplified by her bewildered rival, Betty. Lynch treats us to a sexual version of one of those speeded-up nature films in which a plant grows to full maturity and luxurious blossoming in the space of a single breath. We watch, with a prurient, volatile blend of queasiness and excitement as an unseasoned girl, lacking every protection sophistication offers, advances by means of a solitary squeeze of the hand to the farthest reaches of sexual knowing. Watts reveals a figure who is not merely practiced and utterly confident in her ability to excite and subdue a male quarry, but one who calculates (always) from a bruised position.

Sex is no sooner established as a shared language for the acting couple than it shifts from a spur for provocative teasing to a recognition of authentic hazard. Every maneuver Betty initiates upholds the motto: break or be broken. She significantly reverses the order of one line from her previous rehearsal scene with Rita. "You're playing a dangerous game here" now begins, rather than concludes, the speech that mentions a blackmail threat (from the male) that is "not going to work." Rearranging the sentences places Watts/Betty on top of the danger. She glows with it and gains strength from it, while serving notice that the danger is real—however much sexual play intervenes. As the actress takes convincing ownership of the menace that underlies the film as a whole, in the guise of acting it out, Naomi Watts secures our allegiance to herself as the rightful star of *Mulholland Drive*. Until this scene, Laura Elena Harring's Rita has been the dominant, glamorous female presence in the narrative, in spite, or because of, her amnesiac discombobulation. She is firmly wedded to the film's principal mystery from her initial drive up the street of the film's title during the credit sequence, after which she is instantly set up for murder and saved by a gruesomely providential car crash. We assume that either she or the objects associated with her hold the key (a blue key, as it turns out—Betty's color in the audition) to the past.

In the acting out of her nameless character in the audition, Watts/Betty effectively steals the sense of danger and darkness that her friend Rita had previously embodied. These were the two known ingredients (or reference points) of Rita's otherwise vaporous identity. Watts not only appropriates Rita's "danger and darkness" (and *theft* is exactly the right word for it, calling to mind the old acting phrases, "scene stealing" and "stealing the show"), she enhances their interest by making fully conscious use of them, as far as the audition circumstances permit. She appears to know everything that is at issue, at least for the time being, and by turning up the sexual heat while announcing her involvement in masquerade and her intention to murder, she trumps Harring's more passive possession of mystery. Watts is like a shimmering, ravenous bird bearing the truth of bloodlust out to us on its beak. (Think of the end of *Blue Velvet,* where just such a bird poses for us like a mechanical toy, proudly displaying the insect-kill in its beak.) Betty's incarnation of the bird flies near to us in close-up, where the ragged, excited breath of the lovers is as audible as beating wings.

The vulnerable heart of the once faltering actress turns to animal indifference as she metamorphoses for us and then rises to her full acting height.

Woody is bound tight to this fledgling creature, and he gains a surprising amount of fresh interest as the overshadowed half of a couple. His assigned role is that of the young woman's father's best friend. We learn that he is accustomed to taking advantage of this family attachment as soon as dad leaves for work. Almost all of his lines focus attention on the absent father, either by speculating on his present whereabouts or considering the consequences of his getting wind of the friend's betrayal. The repeatedly invoked father streaks the love scene with shadows of incest. "Dad" seems to be peering over the lovers' shoulders and serving as a troubling stimulus for Betty's arousal. When Betty tells Woody twice to "stop"—unconvincingly, because her continued kissing coaxes him forward—it would appear that she is replying to his query, "What will your dad think of you?" She is lodging a faint verbal protest against Woody's repeated reminders of dad, yet at the same time "fanning her own flames" with the reminders, and using them to push herself out of control.

Near the end of the audition, when Betty brings the dialogue to a halt, places an arm with a closed fist around Woody's shoulder and initiates a lengthy, open-mouth kiss, we may remember that the director had instructed Woody—as his last piece of muddled advice to the players—not to rush the line "Before—what?" this time. Betty's forceful intervention to create a "motivated" pause makes Bob's acting note to her partner something else that she has taken over. The kiss masterfully prevents Woody from rushing, and fills the resulting silence to the brim with suggestiveness and anticipation. Betty's clenched fist is a pantomime carryover from her rehearsal with Rita where she brandished a harmless-looking dinner knife to make clear the extent of her vengeful rage. Now she merely pretends to hold a knife, it would seem, though there is no longer need for one. Perhaps Betty's closed palm holds a "blue key," which will later be the object designated to seal "Rita's" death warrant. Lynch ventures a second Hitchcock allusion here—to the famous Ingrid Bergman embrace of Claude Rains in *Notorious,* which is used to conceal a key hidden in the deceiving partner's hand. In that scene as well, the hidden key marked a major act of betrayal.

Woody's most noteworthy moment in the audition follows Betty's announcement, once the kiss is concluded, that she means to kill him. He takes several beats to assess the seriousness of the threat she has made, letting us see his deliberations about whether to place his trust in her convincing passion or her whispered warning. For the first time in the scene Woody actually establishes prolonged, searching eye contact with Betty. What he discovers in her look not only causes his character to draw back in fear, but the actor himself to do so. (Lynch brilliantly extends the pattern of role confusion at every possible opportunity.) Here we have a parallel to Betty responding at the outset of the audition to the actor's brusque sexual forwardness with a discomfort that appeared to issue from *her*. Woody's upset resembles Betty's earlier scare; if we watch him carefully we see that it is the *performer's* deadly resolve that panics him slightly, and obliges him to draw back. He uses his final line ("Then they'll put you in jail") as a means of recovering his acting composure.

The main purpose of Woody's momentary perturbed dislocation is to establish the idea that Betty is resorting to what actors describe as the trick or technique of "substitution." In order to play an emotionally difficult action with the requisite truthfulness, an actor may supplement the scene's fictional circum-

Betty pushes the erotics of the audition far beyond expectations.

stances with an emotional memory (or substitution from another relationship) that increases the size and strength of her commitment to the fictional givens. We cannot be certain who or what Betty is envisioning, but we do have time to consider that she is looking through Woody—rather than directly at him. It is possible that we flip through our own memories of Betty to find a feasible answer to the double question: "who is she staring at, who is the missing person?" Since nearly all of Betty's life in the film, such as it is, has been spent in Rita's company, and since we have witnessed her practice this same climax (comically) with Rita's faltering assistance only minutes ago, we may well return mentally to that rehearsal to see how Rita fits the present picture. When Betty arrived at the big emotional moment in rehearsal, she told Rita how silly it seemed to shed plausible tears for such a "lame" melodramatic confrontation, and summarized for her benefit the action she was not yet in the mood to "play for real." After the two women share a laugh, and Betty loses concentration, she explains: "Then I cry, cry, cry, and then I say, with big emotion, 'I hate you. I hate us both.'" Rita responds to Betty's embarrassment by reassuring her that whatever the limitations of the scene, Betty has enough talent to make it work. She compliments her with the unstudied admiration of the nonperformer, and with the fine-tuned judgment of an amnesiac.

If Betty is, indeed, picturing Rita when she replays the scene with Woody, she is also disregarding all of her earlier stated notions about how the end of the scene should be handled. She speaks the "hatred" lines softly, and once more she appears to be disengaged from Woody—physically as well as emotionally—when she sounds them out. Her tears, which surface with no cue for active weeping, follow rather than precede the lines, and are visible very briefly. Betty is not *attempting* to weep. She hardly conveys the impression of even noticing her tears. She is rather caught on the hook of an unbidden painful thought, and she closes the audition in the same trancelike condition that she assumed when entering it. She is "alone with herself," yet again ironically taking one of the director's inept preliminary notes and transmuting it into a thing of beauty.

In the logic of the scene itself, the female character may be addressing her hatred to her absent father, with whom she may have a dreadful score to settle. However, in the logic of *Mulholland Drive* as a whole, the playacting of a projected death intersects with the already executed hired slaying of "Betty's" one-time friend and female lover. While Naomi Watts is still busy delineating, on one level, Betty's potentially life-altering audition, her acting speaks to and encloses another woman's tragedy (a woman we haven't, at this point in the narrative, officially met). Given a first-time viewer's state of partial knowing during the audition, the buried tragedy and the guilt flowing from it are pretty much a blank to us, but we can feel them nonetheless taking shape in Betty's face here, long before the sordid "true history" comes to light.

As we return to an awareness of Betty's audition-evaluators in the Hollywood office, we are at the very least mindful of how far we have traveled from the episode's misleadingly crude satiric setup. When Betty demurely descends to earth with her sheepish "Well, there it is" (accompanied by a dancer's hand gestures), our most honest questions for ourselves are likely to be: "How did I believe so thoroughly what that actress was doing, and *what* precisely did I believe?" For belief, of the most impressively various sort, was hauntingly at stake throughout. All the cynical advance preparation we were given did not give us any of the expected detachment from, or intellectual jurisdiction over, the Big Movie Scene's life. The skeptic in us came into the room laden with a will to expose (once again) the Hollywood charade, thereby disavowing our once-upon-a-time enthrallment to such things. What happens instead is that the skeptic is unwelcomely relieved of his superior, scoffing pose. Perhaps the skeptic is secretly pleased to have it taken away, and to be suddenly at the mercy of a sincerity hatched at the very core of artifice.

I began by describing the audition scene as a master-key to star acting. Lynch sets before us, with a thoroughness that is not compromised by extreme compression, all the major barriers to identification with performers and their contrived roles that movie viewers enamored of their own reality sense commonly complain about. He also illuminates how rife with contradictions our engagement with any star performance is, yet shows how an awareness of contradictions, far from rescuing us from naïve involvement, can increase the likelihood of wholesale surrender to the acting hoax. The "argument" of the scene is that both our resistance and assent to what stars reveal to the camera has little to do with what we *know* about the lines dividing imaginary situations from life as it is actually lived. We watch with a feeling approaching awe as a star emerges from the husk of a mildly appealing non-entity, in circumstances which are peppered with warnings against taking fakery of precisely this sort to heart. The full throttle romantic acting of the old Hollywood school penetrates our defenses just as we

are most confident that we understand the limitations—the unembarrassed obviousness—of this kind of acting. Moreover, we find ourselves attending to Betty as someone involved with matters of genuine consequence as she makes her way through a script we have already judged empty, and after she expressly announces her intention to act a part for our critical evaluation.

As viewers, we are struck by the seeming disclosure of a mesmerizing Watts star persona at exactly the point where we have logical grounds for objecting that this "confusing" actress has entirely lost touch with her assigned character. Perhaps our involvement with all star personae works in a similar fashion. The persona is never quite accounted for by the attributes of a specific character, however beguiling that character may be, and in spite of our conviction that a persona and a certain type of role naturally fuse. I would argue that the persona depends on a divided but not grating experience of someone as both emotionally accessible (thus known to us in a persuasively intimate way) and continually eluding our grasp. In the supposedly simple case of John Wayne, for example, the more intensely he appears to be known, the more he manages to preserve (or even increase) his margin of unknownness. The unknown in its seductive relation to the known is always the split that makes a star persona compelling. Betty takes us "through" the screen of appearances, while acting, to suggest a depth of misery-fuelled chicanery in herself. This is a wrenching turn for the viewer because we have been so thoroughly convinced that she dwells entirely, and contentedly, on a flat surface: an ideal inhabitant of a movie screen. Betty's face suddenly opening up to us to demand an emotional response is an exemplary instance of the still inexplicable primitive rite that is cinema. A moving-picture image somehow acquires enough living dimension to swallow the credulous viewer whole. How is it we invest these dubious framed reflections with so much embracing power? How many "real" sights and sounds get through to us with such potent immediacy? Lynch provides us with a quilt of densely interwoven recognitions to take away from his audition scene, leaving us struggling for a glimpse of terra firma within its capacious folds.

Betty, for her part, leaves the audition encumbered with an imperious sex drive that came into being for the actress at the moment she pretended to have one. Succeeding with her audition also results in her acquiring an initiate's sense of darkness, an eagerness to manipulate others' wills, and a troubled awareness of the transformative potential lurking in previously "stable" persons and objects. She must somehow hide all these newfound discoveries from her freshly intrigued (now wary) spectators as well as from herself if she is to keep "Betty" credible. This necessary retreat inward—with its demand that she now *act* Betty as one of many possible roles instead of simply "being" her—serves notice that the person bearing that "see-through" name and temperament is rapidly decomposing. Her time to occupy this cohesive identity, as though it were a permanent safe refuge, has run out.

The emotional structure of this episode, which depends on an unlikely performance taking hold of spectators, onscreen and off, and generating perilous consequences for the performer who risks belief, is a repeating pattern throughout the film's narrative. Also repeated is the alternation between scenes that present riveting, disquietingly exposed performers and scenes that debunk and ridicule the tricks of performance. The latter suggest that all performance boils down to a deceiving stunt when we are let in on the secret. After Betty's audition, recall, we are briefly deceived by a doo-wop quintet of retro-1950s singers lip-synching their way through another audition piece on a briefly hidden sound stage. Once we are apprised of this simple simulation technique, we promptly appraise the next auditioner with a practiced, skeptical air ("How wooden she seems!"), as though our freshly gained knowledge of the precise strings being pulled had always been in our possession. Distance can so easily seem preferable to closeness.

Armed with an awareness refined by repeated demonstrations of the method of artificially linking voice to mimed vocals, we are nevertheless undone by belief once again as we accompany Betty and Rita to the Silencio theater. A Fellini-esque master of ceremonies clearly (and one would think, needlessly) explains to us how sound and image lead separate lives in this illusion-saturated setting. No sooner has he completed a prolonged demonstration of the fact that everything we hear is taped (using musical instruments to demonstrate) than a performer reminiscent of Betty at her audition takes the stage, and causes us to forget instantly the elaborate counsel about sight and sound splitting. In a ravishing Spanish rendition of Roy Orbison's "Crying," the female vocalist, with a single painted tear on her face and dark hair and lipstick suggestive of Rita's recently discarded "vamp" look, carries us so far into the unsuspected depths of this overfamiliar pop song that she becomes the tragic embodiment of *all* lovers' weeping: scalding tears personified. At the height of her aria, she stops moving her lips and collapses on stage; while unconscious she is summarily dragged off by two stagehands. The

"There it is": Betty returns to form in front of her stunned audience.

sound of someone's voice continues singing in her absence—powerfully, mockingly. Betty, who is on the verge of her own final disappearance from the narrative, is a spellbound witness of the singer's ardor, entering unreservedly into the spirit of the performer's sorrowful self-division, and weeping (persuasively) along with Rita who sits beside her.

Just before the Spanish song commences, the sound of an impending storm onstage, connected—like a traumatic memory—to Betty's nervous system, causes her to convulse in her seat. She attains the maximum pitch of visceral identification with a staged event, and has no capacity to separate any part of herself from what she absorbs in this charged atmosphere. On subsequent viewings, it becomes clear that the storm sounds are fused with Betty's (a.k.a. Diane Selwyn) earlier/later act of suicide by pistol shot. The death overtakes her briefly during a performance, as one of the consequences of her belief, and then grants her permission to mourn herself and the woman she herself has caused to die for a few moments before fading from view.[3]

The narrative will soon allow us to conclude that sweetly affirmative "Betty" never existed outside of another actress's fantasy and dream life. (Diane Selwyn, Betty's author, is depressive, morbidly jealous, unsuccessful in her career, a killer, and teetering toward death-by-suicide. Her so-called real life is a melodrama as improbable as the one that Betty tries out for in Wally's office.) Strangely, Betty becomes most "real" to us when we are certain that she had no chance of living at all, and that there are no means, once she is gone, to revive her. As we consider Betty in retrospect, we may well find something terribly truthful about this girl who never imagines herself lost: a purely synthetic, but still striving image of hope, outfitted in the pathetic remnants of everyone's failed innocence. And because Naomi Watts does such a stunning job of expanding and expunging Betty in their joint audition scene, for the duration of *Mulholland Drive* she gets to fulfill Betty's animating dream. She turns into a movie star, one (it is worth noting) whose mimicry of total failure becomes a recipe for success.

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Notes

1. Madeline is Hitchcock's Eurydice, half-returned from the underworld and fated to turn back there irretrievably when her lover insists at the end on taking her literally (thus, making her literal). He demands that she not merely show herself (as a re-created vision), but declare once and for all who she is. Scottie Ferguson is given more chances to look back than Orpheus, but he sees no better and fails more tests—just as decisively. Betty is just as certainly David Lynch's Eurydice. She attempts to revoke her alter ego's death (presumably, while a bullet makes a leisurely journey through Diane Selwyn's brain). The only earthly identity that might be strong enough to undo death is that of an actress on the verge of stardom.
2. Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Childhood around 1900," in *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935-38* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 346.
3. This image of a woman convulsing in the act of witnessing her own likely death scene may have its source in Agnès Varda's *Vagabond*. The corresponding moment in that film depicts a woman staring at herself in a mirror after she accidentally electrocutes herself.

Abstract This essay argues that Betty's audition scene in *Mulholland Drive* is the Rosetta Stone for the mysteries of star acting in Hollywood film. By means of an almost moment-by-moment reconstruction of the audition segment, Toles demonstrates how our presumed ironic superiority to artifice and role playing is cunningly exchanged for a believer's faith in movie acting truth.

Bedevil is a very playful, old-fashioned word that no one really uses any more. It means "to haunt and taunt." The style of the film is teasing. You're following characters who are haunted by something, and I suggest perhaps we're all a little haunted in a way, and we probably don't ever come to terms with it.

—Tracey Moffatt[1]

Catherine Summerhayes

Haunting Secrets: Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil*

Tracey Moffatt's first feature-length film, *beDevil,* certainly "haunts and taunts" its audiences—now and throughout the time that has passed since its controversial release at the Sydney Film Festival in June of 1993.[2] The original outrage was caused by a dilemma which the film, and Moffatt's history as a visual artist, posed for critics and audiences: "Is it art? Or is it film?" Throughout its many early reviews, especially in Australia, this dual question was never resolved, even though the film was nominated as an Official Selection for *Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993. One (apocryphal?) story of *beDevil*'s first screening tells how a famous figure in the Australian film industry argued quite publicly and vehemently with her husband, an equally famous film critic, long into the opening night party and over the next couple of days. Their argument proceeded along these lines: "That was positively the worst film I have ever seen"—"Darling, don't be so silly, it's a work of art . . . It shouldn't be shown in a cinema at all. It should be in an art gallery." This anecdote indicates the deep disquiet that people still feel when trying to understand any manifestation of Moffatt's artistic practice—a practice that continues to stretch the boundaries of form and genre. It is especially her filmmaking, however, that makes use of the artistic stance of questioning and irreverence in order to make people *feel* what it is like to question the status quo. She invites her audiences to experience how it feels not to be sure what you think—to reach no conclusion, only raise other questions.

An Aboriginal Australian, currently based in New York, Moffatt is best known for her photographic art: staged, narrative photoseries which include *Something More* (1989), *Up in the Sky* (1997), *Scarred for Life* (1994), *Free Falling* (1997), *Laudanum* (1999), and *Invocations* (2000). Like these photoseries, *beDevil* is a work of fiction and is her only feature film to date. Moffatt has also made four short films that, like *beDevil,* challenge the formal, generic boundaries that are perceived to exist between film and art.[3] *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987) weaves overlapping stories from Australia's colonial past and present: excerpts from early colonists'

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journals, staged images, and re-enactments are intercut with a realist, documentary-style tale of mischief from Moffatt's own past. In 1988, she made *Moodeitj Yorgas (Solid Women*) for the Western Australian Women's Advisory Council to the Premier. This lyric 22-minute video presents interviews with prominent Aboriginal women together with dramatic segments of women in black silhouette who enact brief vignettes over stories told in two Aboriginal languages.

Moffatt's most acclaimed short film is *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989). In 19 minutes of highly stylized footage, Moffatt paints a story of the fear, love, and helplessness in the relationship between an adopted Aboriginal girl and her Anglo mother. I use the word "paints" because this is an audiovisual story that relies on vivid, glossy colors for its narrative power. For example, the highly polished, deep red floor of the main set reflects the mauves and vivid blues of an Australian desert landscape. These shiny colors immediately locate the story within the glare and heat of inland Australia and establish the film's story as one of human endurance. Felicity Fox's soundscape tears through these rich and carefully composed images of old- and middle-aged despair. The relentless blowing of a desert wind, human and electronic shrieks and cries, whipcracks, and the mechanical chugging noise of a train are woven together with silence into a web of grief. A dialogue emerges through a negotiation of image and sound design, carrying the viewer toward imaginings that are far beyond the constraints of the spoken word. In *Night Cries,* Moffatt refines her use of disjunctive audio and visual images, a device we will see expanded upon later in *beDevil.*

As part of her exhibition for the Dia Centre in New York in 1997, Moffatt produced her fourth short film, *Heaven,* a 28-minute video constructed primarily from non-fictional footage of male surfers removing their wetsuits. With this "documentary" exhibition video, she focuses closely on the act of looking as a way of exploring power and gender divides. The footage was filmed by anonymous women—in Moffatt's words, "I wanted it to look like a bored housewife shot it . . ."[4] — and edited into a sweeping, visually jarring collage of beaches and men's bodies (including genitalia). Although initially presented as a video installation, the work is quite long enough to stand alone as a short film, and Ronin Films has released it on VHS as a "documentary." This categorization accentuates Moffatt's use of documentary style in all her filmic work and the ambiguities that subsequently emerge around her "truthful," but fictional stories.[5] With *Heaven,* Moffatt explores questions of filmic form and artistic practice. In her earlier *beDevil,* these questions are framed through the forceful structure of a feature film and her filmic practice, for the first time, is exposed to a scrutiny allowed only by the prolonged viewing time required for a feature-length film.

Three Ghost Stories

beDevil is 90 minutes long and divided into three separate narrative segments. Each segment is based on one of three "ghost stories" told to Moffatt as a child by members of her family.[6] As with her short films, these stories travel across a treacherous domain of interracial relations and personal history with a rare quality of humor and compassion. In *beDevil,* Moffatt explores how, when allied with humor, distress experienced during performances of filmic reception can be directed towards "different ways of looking" rather than a "turning away." She uses humor derived from irony and parody in order to allow a close inspection of difficult social problems. Moffatt has a similar "joking" relationship with tragedy, based on irony, parody, mockery, and the unholy glee that often accompanies these former strategies within the parameters of Australian humor. This joking relationship does not undercut the dignity of the characters she creates through her art, nor does it subvert the distress that is communicated through her narratives. This humor allows Moffatt's entrance into a storytelling world of gossip, dreams, innuendo, and imaginings.

The first story, "Mr. Chuck," is told through two primary "documentary characters," a term used by Moffatt in her script to denote those characters as set within a fake documentary format.[7] The first narrator is Shelley (Diana Davidson), an older white woman. Through the glass windows of her modern home, she speaks directly to the camera about the American GIs who were based on Bribie Island during World War Two. One of them, "Mr. Chuck," drove his jeep into a swamp while he was drunk, and died. The film presents his ghost haunting the bubbling, sucking mud of this swamp and the children who played there. Indeed, a ghostly face forms this story's last image as the swamp laps around an unconscious young boy's foot. Shelley goes on to tell the

The swamp where the new movie theater is being built in "Mr. Chuck."

story of this child, an Aboriginal boy called Rick (Ben Kennedy) of whom she was fond, even though he stole candy from her shop. He was regularly beaten by his step-uncles and Shelley states that she regretted not intervening in some way. It is the older Rick (Jack Charles) who serves as the second narrator of the story, speaking from the glass-walled interview room of a gaol.

In the second story, "Choo Choo Choo Choo," Moffatt herself plays the younger Ruby Morphett, a character drawn from her own mother. Her script describes this story as follows:

> Documentary characters recount the tale of the ghost train and girl who haunt a local railway siding. We meet older Ruby and her rowdy gang of women friends as they return to the old railway siding for a picnic of designer bush food. We see Ruby in flashback living with her young family at the siding. We follow the family's spooky experiences with the mysterious locomotive and the unfortunate ghost girl [who was blind].8

In the third story, "Lovin' the Spin I'm In,"

> The action revolves around a rundown warehouse flat which is restlessly haunted by the ghost of young lovers Beba and his crazy hippy girl girlfriend Minnie who died there. . . . At night strange noises, smoke fields and dark shapes emanate from within the warehouse, they "bedevil" those who dare to tamper with their old stomping ground.9

The three stories begin and end with distinct opening and closing sequences and separate casts and characters, but they are connected in that they all tell stories of hauntings and all are concerned with interactions between people who come from different cultural heritages. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people feature as main characters, and each story addresses how these characters negotiate their lives at the margins of a multicultural society.

The younger Ruby Morphett (Tracy Moffatt), a character based on the filmmaker's mother.

Telling Secrets With My Own Body

More specifically, the ghost stories of *beDevil* are concerned with a particular set of socially constructed "secrets" which have existed for over 200 years—secrets that are involved with the many and varied experiences of being an indigenous person in Australian settler society. They are stories of ghosts and memories, of secrets which, in Foucault's sense, are not so much repressed as they are nurtured in the form of carefully controlled discourses where "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance."[10] In *Nice Coloured Girls* and *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy,* Moffatt had already introduced her discussion of such repressed stories—especially those that involve women. The secrets told in *beDevil* further confront the distressing issues of child abuse, alcoholism, physical violence, and imprisonment. Children, women, and men of several cultural heritages become the haunted characters in these ghost stories. Through her telling of "secrets" Moffatt continues to break through the official discourse about indigenous people in Australia that has been carefully controlled by the institutions of academia, religion, the state, and the art industry. And yet *beDevil* is not a "heavy" film, though it demands close attention.

Moffatt acutely understands how she can use her own body and history in order to translate these various social "secrets" across the cultural boundaries that exist within multicultural Australian society: in her own words, "I am not interested in making monocultural films."[11] In *beDevil,* she presents audiovisual images of Australians from Aboriginal, Anglo/Celtic, Greek, Chinese, and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds interacting with one another. The narratives are laced through with interracial relationships and draw as much from Moffatt's Irish-Australian heritage as her Aboriginality. She acknowledges her heritage from both her white and Aboriginal Murri relatives and the ghost stories of *beDevil* are drawn from both sides. "Choo Choo Choo Choo" belongs to her Aboriginal mother and the third story, "Lovin' the Spin I'm In," to her Brisbane relatives.[12] Moffatt explores the boundaries that exist between the stereotyped characters of generic storytelling and the impact of such stories on individual people. In creating a filmic gestural practice concerned with an *experience* of "secrets," she imparts information that is usually "hidden" or otherwise obscured.

As in her early photoseries, *Something More,* Moffatt uses, in the second story of *beDevil,* images of her

own private body in the public sphere of her art. As she herself plays the part of her own mother, she exposes her use of the camera as a device through which she can publicly address very private issues. In offering her own body as filmic actor, Moffatt explicitly claims the "socially inscribed fraught space" of the performance artist. As described by Rebecca Schneider, this is "a space at once exceedingly private, full of located and personal particulars of reading, and radically public. . . ."[13] Moffatt is thus a performance artist who employs her own body in "direct address" to an audience in order to describe the way in which individual bodies experience how, in Meaghan Morris's words, "the burden of history actually feels, and where it falls, most of the time."[14] Moffatt's filmic and photographic audiences are invited into performances of reception that involve both an intimate and a sensual exchange between artist and audience. She uses her own image and history over and over again throughout her filmic and photographic work, inviting a comparison with the artistic practices of Cindy Sherman and Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Moffatt's use of her own image in *beDevil* recalls Kahlo's persistent painting of her own image, a process which Harjit Kaur Khaira describes as constituting "a nexus of diverse currents and multiple identities."[15] In the third story, "Lovin' the Spin I'm In," Moffatt similarly uses actor Luke Robert's body as one that is inscribed with the image of Kahlo (he dresses up as the artist and performs his interpretation of her persona both in *beDevil* and his solo stage show). With this explicit representation of Kahlo on Robert's body, she calls attention again to the way in which an artist can use her/his own actual body as a "time image," in Gilles Deleuze's sense, which marks the existence and history of a particular colonialism.[16]

Embodiments of Bewilderment—Seeing Secrets

beDevil's complex narratives and audiovisual images demand more than one viewing. In her script, Moffatt refers to several planned "subliminal" images.[17] Several of these fleeting frames occur in "Choo Choo Choo Choo," including the little ghost's foot that kicks out from behind a wall on the verandah of the old Charleville house. Another example, which both startles the viewer and can only really be appreciated via the pause button on the VCR, occurs when the smiling blond father in "Mr. Chuck" transforms briefly into a threatening phallic image as he momentarily snarls and sticks out a curling sexual tongue. Halfway through the bush cooking segment in "Choo Choo Choo Choo," the camera pans widely to the left and shakily focuses on women in the distance who are calling out (initially off-camera) in an Aboriginal language. The women hold something up on a stick, but what are they saying? We are offered a translation by Ruby shortly after, but what are they holding? I only saw the "live" snake with the help of the pause button on the VCR (once again), and finally it made sense that Ruby's translation remarked on a "terrine" made of snake. In *beDevil,* Moffatt requires an audience to return again and again to her text in order to comprehend a vast and bewildering array of audiovisual "secrets" which lie hidden as fleeting, hard-to-see images, complementing and highlighting the social secrets addressed by the film.

Moffatt provokes this bewildered, "bedeviled" viewing position in several other ways. For instance, *beDevil*'s three stories repeatedly juxtapose stylized sets against natural, "found" sets, such as the main street in Charleville and the rubbish dump and old house by the railway siding in "Mr. Chuck." Similarly, the found sugarcane fields in "Lovin' the Spin I'm In" are set against the highly stylized sets inside Mentmore Studios in Sydney. This provocative use of sets is coupled with her denaturalized storytelling methods. Moffatt attributes her primary stylistic inspiration in this film to the Japanese filmmaker Masaki Kobayashi and his film *Kwaidan* (1964), which uses different ghost stories in order to create four discrete narrative segments within the one filmic text.[18] Moffatt, however, extends Kabayoshi's format of separate ghost stories in order to present a sometimes-confusing array of subplots, narrative voices, and narrative styles.

Ruby and her husband Stompie (Banula [David] Marika) with baby, in front of the old haunted house.

Unfinished Stories

beDevil's overall story does not move through classical narrative processes of exposition, crisis, and resolution. Rather, it invites its audiences to guess at how individual textual segments can be linked temporally and spatially, both within the three separate filmic segments, and with regard to how the separate stories relate to one another. In "Choo Choo Choo Choo," for example, Moffatt uses two primary locations: the town of Charleville in central Queensland and the indoor studio in Sydney in which a huge replica of the old Charleville house was built. The filmic space created in this story is further divided into three other subsidiary locations around Charleville, only two of which are narratively linked. The third location is Chinese-Australian Bob Mallee's (Cecil Parkee) local museum. The narrative in this story shifts explicitly, and confusingly, between the voices of Bob Mallee and the older Ruby, across these three filmic places, and between a filmically constructed opposition between present and remembered time.

One result of this constant shifting through different places and time is a sense, for an audience, that it is nearly always the "middle" of the story. It is possible to understand Moffatt to be taking the endings of *beDevil*'s three ghost stories out of the world of the filmic text and offering them, instead, to the various and individual imaginings of an audience. Even the order in which these stories are presented directs an audience toward perceiving a lack of narrative closure. Production manager Anthony Buckley commented on how he thought the order was "wrong," and that "Choo Choo Choo Choo" should have been the closing story,[19] as it is this story that certainly presents the highest degree of narrative closure.

Moffatt also makes use of parallel narratives within her wider plot. These stories are secondary in the telling of her ghost stories, but frequently dominate the emotional reception of the film. As explained earlier, the ghost story in "Mr. Chuck" is about an American soldier who drowned in an Australian swamp in World War Two—but this story is told through the use of another story about the neglect and abuse of children as well as the neglect and abuse of Aboriginal people within the penal system. "Choo Choo Choo Choo" tells the story of a little white girl (played by blond Aboriginal Karen Saunders) who haunts an Aboriginal family maintaining an isolated reach of desert railway track. Yet this story unfolds, in part, through a documentary-style cooking segment at an old rubbish dump where the older Ruby's netball team prepares bush food in the style of *haute cuisine*.[20]

The soundtrack of this cooking scene consists of women speaking to the camera and to each other, often simultaneously. Their many voices have different agendas that nevertheless come together as this scene's narrative structure. Moffatt uses both onscreen and offscreen voices to carry the often tenuous thread of her ghost stories, and these voices often speak more than one language. This use of different languages, as well as her use of parallel narratives, allows another story to unfold. The three ghost stories trail their narratives through several other stories, which are in turn told by several different people. One example occurs in the third story, when the story of the "doomed couple," Beba (Pinau Ghee) and Minnie (Patricia Handy), is told by Voula (Dina Panozzo)) and Dimitri (Lex Marinos) to entirely different audiences, via the juxtapositions of images through deep and changing focus within single shots. Voula addresses her son, while Dimitri addresses his business associates. The sequence ends as Voula tells her son that Emelda (Debai Baira), Beba's mother, knows why they were so unhappy. The segment, however, never makes clear just why the couple was so unhappy and violent toward each other. This telling of parts of the same story by different people does not so much offer different versions of the same story as it does insist that the whole of a story cannot be told without the contributions of several people. The narrative voices that tell this ghost story are either inadequate (Voula and Dimitri) or silent (Emelda and The Artist). The final ghost story in *beDevil* can in this way be understood as an "unfinished story"—a secret that is never told.

The dominant narrative that winds its way through all the stories of *beDevil* suggests a meta-narrative about how different ways of "looking" and different ways of remembering events and situations can constitute crucial components of any story. Moffatt's investigation into how film can interrogate the ways people look at each other is compounded by the fact that she is focusing on the looks that occur between people who must negotiate several binary, socially constructed distinctions in order to communicate with one another at all. These distinctions include those between children/adults, men/women, Anglo/Celtic, Anglo/Saxon-Australians/the rest of multicultural Australia and—most significantly with regard to *beDevil*—the stereotypical distinctions that society perceives between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. With *beDevil,* Moffatt constantly challenges

and sometimes confuses audiences with her relentless confrontation of both filmic conventions and racial stereotypes.

Against the Stereotype— The Exaggeration of Binary Difference

In her photoseries and in her films, Moffatt accesses and reassesses past perceptions of social categories. She does this by working through what Adrian Martin calls "a variety of excessive economies" where the very excesses themselves are necessary in order to understand "the *communicative* function of style."[21] In *beDevil*, one of the dominant stylistic excesses is Moffatt's aforementioned and plentiful use of binary distinctions. Such distinctions are presented in the filmic text of *beDevil* both subtly and explicitly through the repetition of particular visual motifs. In "Mr. Chuck," Moffatt explores the binary of imprisoned/not imprisoned through the repeated image of glass as an imprisoning substance in the representations of Shelley behind the glass windows of her home on Bribie Island and the older Rick leaning on the glass wall in the interview area of a gaol. The repetition shows how this binary manifests as experience. By showing how "transparent" glass can be used to create imprisonment, the film offers a resistance to thinking about imprisonment as a simple binary issue (imprisonment versus liberty).

Moffatt also challenges and bewilders audiences through her drifting, non-stereotypical characterizations: she does not present easily accessible motivations to her narrative characters. Obscuring the identity of characters when they first appear, she presents them simply as slightly mysterious people who are in the middle of a larger story (which is in fact the story of their own lives). Moffatt's own words clearly describe this sense that character motivation is not a primary issue in the construction of her filmic narrative: "Clever plots with twists and turns are never what I go for. *Bedevil* [sic] is like this: we are with these characters, we are going to hang out with them for a while and we see what they get up to."[22]

We can see how the characters in this film constitute much more than vehicles for narrative content in the opening minutes of *beDevil*'s second segment, as the audience is introduced to the ghost story by both a Chinese-Australian and a group of dark Aboriginal women riding in the back of a pick-up truck. These first few minutes of "Choo Choo Choo Choo" present two separate challenges to racial stereotyping: a Chinese-Australian who runs a local museum that exhibits artifacts from "white" Australian settlement, and a group of dark, North Australian Aboriginal women whom Moffatt firmly locates, via their accessories, as active participants in late twentieth-century Australian society. One of these women (Maudie) wears wrap-around, mirrored sunglasses and waves a bottle of Evian around, while another holds up a "ghetto-blaster" playing the song "Ghan to Alice."[23]

The challenges to racial stereotypes in this scene are multifold. First, the people in this filmic segment are women—ethnographic film and anthropological research, prior to the 1980s, had focused on Aboriginal men. These women form a netball team and are shown in the back of a vehicle driven by one of them —they do not "need" men for either of these activities. Secondly, these women are drinking mineral water rather than alcohol (alcoholism has been a major problem for rural communities, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and many Aboriginal remote communities are now "dry"). Finally, the women wear sunglasses (rather than squinting pathetically or nobly into a sun-drenched landscape); these sunglasses make the women's eyes impenetrable as their mirror effect reflects the camera's gaze back at the viewer and this complex gaze becomes part of the women's faces. Thus these women are depicted as using artifacts in ways that clearly undermine the stereotypes more usually associated with indigenous Australians; such a sense of subversion recalls *The Movie Star* (1985), Moffatt's photographic portrait of Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil relaxing with ghetto blaster on the bonnet of a car at Bondi Beach.

beDevil's assault on racial and gender-based stereotypes can be understood as a continuation of a filmic investigation that began with *Nice Coloured Girls*. The earlier film mocks binaries that Karen Jennings describes as: "nice girls/nasty girls; white culture/black culture; the past/the present; predator/prey; exploiter/exploited."[24] *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* again overturns stereotypical images, as Moffatt depicts an Aboriginal woman caring for her very old, white adoptive mother, challenging the assumption that white Australians must always "care" for "helpless" Aboriginal people. Her challenging of racial stereotype does not deny cultural differences between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, but rather explores such differences by referring to cultural similarities that can be obscured by the more obvious differences. One such reference occurs in Ruby's

description of her companions as "my netball team." This single description draws many women into a receptive performance that is based on their participatory understanding of how it feels to be part of a netball team. Moffatt uses a team sport in order to filmically conjure the idea that people from different cultural backgrounds can experience life in similar, if not identical, ways.

Moffatt's blurring of binary distinctions extends to those that are perceived to exist between fiction and nonfiction film. As she says of *beDevil*:

> With the fake documentary segments, I was freer. There is something very enjoyable about cinema verité [sic], that style, that looseness. I felt I needed something like that as a relief, to get out of the formal quality of what I shot in the studio. . . . It's like giving the audience a breather.[25]

Moffatt makes two significant critiques of documentary film in *beDevil*. Her explicit use of direct address and "fake interviews" calls attention to both the quantity and quality of discourses from anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking, which have previously addressed the question of cultural difference with regard to indigenous Australians. Up until 1990, there were at least 6000 films about Aboriginal people, and most of these were documentaries.[26] Thus Moffatt's quotation of documentary film practices needs to be contextualized against this immensity, as well as in terms of her critique of *how* documentary filmmakers obtain their footage.

In "Choo Choo Choo Choo," the younger Ruby (Tracey Moffatt) listens for the "ghost train."

Looking Back At You

The first critique occurs with the "fake documentary" segments in "Choo Choo Choo Choo" that present the older Ruby in direct address to the camera. This address is straight into the lens and it "plays" with the camera (wiping the lens, peering into it closely) in such a way that it is possible for a viewer to speculate that no one is operating the camera—that it is set to automatically record home movie-style footage. Besides introducing humor, this form of direct address interrogates the way in which documentary film has been used as an "objective" instrument of observation within anthropology.

If this sequence is understood as "fake home movie," however, new questions arise about who the intended viewer for this sequence might be, both in the world of the film's narrative, and in the historically real world in which this film is publicly released. Deb Verhoeven comments on the confusion which can accompany Moffatt's use of direct address in her fake documentary sequences in *beDevil* and how this confusion can be understood as an invitation to the audience to "fill in the gaps that lie within her narratives with information gleaned from the audience's own personal individual histories: "Although it is not always clear who (rather than what) the camera represents, or even what distance we are expected to take from the action, the invitation to participate is certainly there."[27] Moffatt's use of direct address can also be described in terms of Paul Willemen's "fourth look" in cinema (the "returned gaze"),[28] and bell hooks' black "oppositional" gaze, "wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see."[29] In hooks' and Willemen's sense of the "returned gaze" as a site of resistance, Moffatt's use of direct address in *beDevil* draws attention to how film can be used to unsettle power relations implicit in any social practice that involves looking at other people.

While Moffatt uses a humorous, although critical, gesture towards documentary in the second ghost story of *beDevil,* the more formal fake interviews which occur in the first story are much more ominous with regard to her critique of anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking. The white woman, Shelley, directly addresses the camera, as she appears to answer questions that have been edited out of the filmic text. She looks both away from the camera, and into it. There is little doubt about our viewing position—the audience for these sequences is intended to see an interview situation. In the sequences in which the older Rick speaks to the camera, Moffatt throws the vulnerability of her characters back at the viewer, using cinema's "fourth look" in a particularly powerful way: as he talks about his childhood, the actor looks sometimes just to the right of the camera and sometimes directly into the camera. This address to the camera suggests a style of documentary filmmaking that uses a crew of only one or two people. Such small crews are commonly associated with the styles of "interactive" or "observational" documentary often used by ethnographic filmmakers. In suggesting a "looking past the camera"

toward the supposed person asking the questions rather than into the camera itself, the filmic text suggests an interview situation fraught with unequal power relations. Bill Nichols draws attention to how power relations can be biased within an interview situation in his discussion of interactive documentary:

> The interview is an overdetermined structure. It arises in relation to more than oral history and it serves far more than one function. Most basically, the interview testifies to a power relation in which institutional hierarchy and regulation pertain to speech itself.[30]

Nichols' concept of the "masked" interview particularly describes those apparent monologues to camera that have been set up by asking questions that are edited out of the film's text.[31] Both Shelley's and the older Rick's monologues suggest such a "masking" of the questioner and of the questions asked. As he leans his hands against his clear glass prison wall, the older Rick appears to be in institutional custody somewhere. His looking past the camera can be understood as a depiction of a person who is accustomed to institutionalized authority, custody, and interview situations.

Thus, rather than use the "gritty realist" conventions usually associated with audiovisual representations of indigenous Australians, Moffatt's style in *beDevil* (and in *Nice Coloured Girls*) questions the various modes of realism that are conventionally used to distinguish nonfiction and fiction film. She deals with the *concept* of documentary rather than documentary itself, in the same way in which Robert Marshall describes how she can be understood to discuss "the *concept* of childhood suffering" in her photoseries *Scarred for Life* (1994).[32] In its use of "fake documentary," *beDevil* explicitly and concisely critiques the relationship between documentary filmmakers and the social actors whom they film. Strange as it may seem in this age of reality television, this film reminds us that some people would prefer not to be filmed in circumstances beyond their control. As the woman sipping the glass of Chardonnay in the cooking segment says, while looking directly into the camera: "Get! Don't do that!"

Secret Sounds

Carl Vine's music weaves *beDevil's* highly stylized narrative sequences together with a seamlessly styled stream of music through which Moffatt intersperses other sounds, dialogue, and silence. She uses these latter forms of sound more in the way in which Hollywood filmmakers use music: as devices of incidental emphasis that can enhance and elaborate the musical component of her audiovisual images. She uses both sound and music as equal partners with visual images for "setting the mood" of her film's narrative. This setting of mood is as important as the stories that are depicted. Moffatt herself comments on how she was influenced by Yasujiro Ozu and Masaki Kobayashi: "The sound is really half the movie in their case, and it's half the movie in *Bedevil* [sic]."[33] In this sense, the "everyday" and/or "theatrical" tones (or grains) of voices are as important, if not more so, than the dialogue that these voices speak. Her confident use of high volume levels of sound under montages of closely edited short shots drives the narrative pace of the film. This pace invites performances of reception that accept a sense of bewilderment as inherent to the film's text.

Recalling the work of Nicolas Roeg in *Castaway* (1987), Moffatt overlays sounds that reveal their sources only on closer listening: for example, the roaring of animals and the sounds of fighting and metal objects being dropped or overturned in "Mr. Chuck." Another "hidden" sound in this story occurs with the entrance of the young Rick's step-uncle as the three children sit on the bed sharing out stolen candy. The sound effect attributed to this character seems to be constructed from a dog bark laid over the growl of an animal or a slowed-down, human cry of anger. In *beDevil,* such forceful linking of musical themes with almost subliminal sounds invites a particular understanding of the sound track: it is a textual "voice" that is in dialogic discourse with the visual text. In other words, the soundtrack constitutes a self-contained communicative text that combines with the visual text in order to contradict, resonate with, or emphasize various aspects of Moffatt's filmic narratives. The complexity of sounds and images in this text contributes substantially to a filmic gestural practice that addresses "secrets": the hidden, suppressed stories that can be located only by a careful, prolonged inspection of both visual and auditory images.

Two minor characters in "Mr. Chuck," a builder (Ken Canning) and his girlfriend (Imby Pilt), have lunch on the swamp/building site.

Film and Art

beDevil was originally assessed in terms of a commercially released feature film and in Australia, almost without exception, was either condemned for being inaccessible to its audiences, or praised as courageous for its filmic innovation and expression of a particularly problematic Australian experience. Its release at international festivals and art-house venues has attracted critical responses that reflect rather its formidable status as part of Moffatt's overall artistic practice. *beDevil* is still reaching new audiences and it is interesting to consider how the early film/art dilemma did not condemn *beDevil* to a critical limbo. Ten years on, *beDevil*'s continuing reception affirms its status as both film and art. Its current reception happens in three ways: as a teaching text, in special screenings, and in art gallery exhibition spaces. Ronin Films, its Australian distributors, produced a "study guide" for secondary and tertiary teaching and have released the film on DVD. Moffatt, in conjunction with her international distributors, Women Make Movies, continues to show the film on her speaking tours to colleges and universities in the United States. In company with her four short films, *beDevil* was included in the National Gallery of Australia's retrospective exhibition of Moffatt's work in 2000. It needs to be considered as part of any overview of Moffatt's artistic work, and similarly, because it is the filmic work of a major visual artist, it continues to contribute to our understanding of how far the filmic form can be pushed and still be a narrative vehicle.

Moffatt's visual and audiovisual images are not "comfortable"—they pose too many questions. She teases her audiences with hard-to-see images and sounds and asks questions about vision, memory, and history that do not imply that there are any simple or even corresponding answers. Rather, her visual and audiovisual interrogations invite reflection on the usefulness of ambiguity and uncertainty as appropriate responses to the terrifying beauty and mayhem that exist both in her texts and in the world from which she draws her images. These senses of ambiguity and uncertainty embedded within her films and photoseries are not restricted to considerations of narrative and meaning; they are also very much at the heart of her entire artistic practice. She plays with artistic form in ways that invite critical speculation on how far it is possible to push categories of genre and artistic form before their boundaries dissolve and only questions of cultural meaning remain.

The haunted warehouse in "Lovin' the Spin I'm In."

Moffatt's films push "film" into that demanding realm of artistic practice that is never satisfied with form and that rarely reaches an apotheosis that is recognized by the artist as a resolution. Most works of art are "works in progress," where progress can be understood as a continuing discussion of problems to do with medium, content, and meaning. Moffatt's films cannot simply be subsumed within the categories of "video art" or "film." They are too long to be disregarded as "not film." Their movements and narratives also persist through time in ways that unmistakably refer to film genres: they tell stories, they show the "world" in a filmic fashion.

Shared Ghosts, Shared Secrets

beDevil also, and significantly for Australians, performs a specific intercultural communication between indigenous and non-indigenous people that suggests that there are "secret" stories embedded in this relationship. In her films, as in her photoseries, Moffatt seems to seize on Comolli's (and Brecht's) concept of an "active" audience, in order to ask again and again throughout the filmic text that the spectator play what Comolli describes as "the game" of the spectacle—a game that relies on "the capturing power of fiction."[34] *beDevil* draws the viewer beyond a sense of spectacle and asks the broader question, "Why this particular spectacle?" Through her persistent juxtaposition of the easily visible against the difficult to see and the easily heard against the difficult to hear, Moffatt is concerned with the exposure of "secrets." But this exposure does not necessarily provide resolution in the sense of offering answers, nor does it suggest a resolution that gives a sense of social "healing" as described in E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of how film can be used in order to reverse the "imperial gaze."[35]

When asked, "Do you compare the different domestic spaces of your Koori[36] background and your white background?"[37] Moffatt answers,

> Yes, I look at spaces differently because I have a background in both cultures. But I don't think you can call the stories particularly white

> or Aboriginal. . . . I merely reflect what I see in Australian society. For me, Australian society is now a very mixed society, very multicultural—a hybrid society.[38]

With *beDevil,* Moffatt looks across and into the social boundaries that mark the "differences" between cultures and other groupings of people that are distinguished by society. She is not so much saying that these differences do not exist, as that they may not exist in the ways in which they have so far been understood. Moffatt creates a complex, sometimes hard to read text that addresses Australian society's continuing negotiation with its indigenous people. With this vividly textured, complicated, and passionate film, Moffatt avoids easy stereotypes of victims and oppressors. She not only deals with "repressed stories" but also looks at the bewildered and bedeviled ways in which non-indigenous and indigenous Australians live with each other. Moffatt draws on all aspects of her artistic practice in *beDevil*—a film that shows how people are haunted by tired and sad secrets as they live through relationships that are marked by tolerance and good will as well as by stupidity and malice.

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Notes

1. Tracey Moffatt in *Vogue Australia* (June, 1993): 57.
2. *beDevil* was released by Southern Star Entertainment in 1993, as a video by Ronin Films. Funded for $2.5 million by the Australian Film Finance Corporation, *beDevil* was filmed from October 5th to November 13th, 1992, with a preproduction period of only six weeks. Four locations were used: Mentmore Studios at Rosebery in Sydney, Bribie Island in Queensland, Charleville in far northwest Queensland (including the house "Sommariva," a 20-minute long drive outside of Charleville), and sugar-cane fields in northern New South Wales.
3. For discussions of Moffatt's earlier films, see Patricia Mellencamp, "Haunted History: Tracey Moffatt and Julie Dash," *Discourse* 16.2 (Winter 1993-94); Meaghan Morris, "Beyond Assimilation: Aboriginality, Media History, and Public Memory," *aedon* 4.1 (November 1996); Laleen Jayamanne, " 'Love me tender, love me true, never let me go . . .' A Sri Lankan reading of Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy,*" in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference,* ed. Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993); E. Ann Kaplan, "Aborigines, Film, and Moffatt's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*: An Outsider's Perspective," in *Picturing the "Primitif": Images of Race in Daily Life,* ed. Julie Marcus, (Canada Bay, NSW: LHR Press, 2000).
4. Quoted in Jane Cole's *Up in the Sky: Tracey Moffatt in New York* (1999).
5. I have analysed this video in some depth in "Who in *Heaven*? Tracey Moffatt, Men in Wet-Suits and the Female Gaze," Catherine Summerhayes, *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 33.1 (Winter, 2003): 63-80.
6. Moffatt in John Conomos and Raffaele Caputo, "*BE-DEVIL*: Tracey Moffatt," *Cinema Papers,* vol. 93 (May, 1993): 28.
7. Tracey Moffatt, "A Sixth Draft Script by Tracey Moffatt," unpublished, iv.
8. Ibid., 26.
9. Ibid., 57.
10. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 101. See also pp. 34-35.
11. Tracey Moffatt in Claire Corbett, "Drama Queen," *Rolling* Stone (April, 1993): 96.
12. Moffatt in Annabel Dean, "The Ghosts in the Family," *Sydney Morning Herald,* 28 October 1993: 20.
13. Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 52-53.
14. Morris, "Beyond Assimilation: Aboriginality, Media History and Public Memory," 19. Although also relevant to *beDevil,* Morris wrote this phrase specifically for Moffatt's film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*.
15. Harjit Kaur Khaira, "Post-colonial Theory: A Discussion of Directions and Tensions with Special Reference to the Work of Frida Kahlo," *Kunapipi,* vol. 20, no.2 (1998): 49.
16. See Deleuze's description of "time as series": "Sometimes it is a character himself crossing a limit, and becoming another, in an act of storytelling which connects him to a people past or to come . . . ," in *Cinema2: The Time Image* (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 275.
17. Moffatt makes five references to such images in "A Sixth Draft Script by Tracey Moffatt," pp. 23, 28, 33, 43, 52.
18. Ibid., ii.
19. Personal Communication with Anthony Buckley, 30 November, 1999. Buckley thought the story order should have been "Lovin' the Spin I'm In," "Mr Chuck," "Choo Choo Choo Choo."
20. For a discussion of this cooking segment that addresses issues of identity, see Mary Zournazi, " 'The Queen Victoria of Bush Cuisine': Foreign Incorporation and Oral Consumption within the Nation," *Communal/Plural,* vol. 4 (1994): 79-89.
21. Adrian Martin, "*MISE EN SCENE* IS DEAD: or The Expressive, The Excessive, The Technical and The Stylish," *Film—Matters of Style,* ed. Adrian Martin, *Continuum, The Australian Journal of Media and Culture,* vol. 5 no. 2 (1992): 117-118.
22. Moffatt in Conomos and Caputo, "*BEDEVIL*," 30.
23. "Ghan to Alice," written by Herbie Laughton and performed by Auriel Andrews.

24. Karen Jennings, *Sites of Difference: Cinematic Representations of Aboriginality and Gender* (South Melbourne: Australian Film Institute Research and Information Centre, 1993), 70.
25. "Drama Queen," 95.
26. Marcia Langton, "*Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television": An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things* (North Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993), 24.
27. Deb Verhoeven, "A Film Possessed," *Film News* (October, 1993): 9.
28. Paul Willemen, "The Fourth Look," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994), 99-110.
29. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 116.
30. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 50.
31. Ibid., 51-52.
32. Robert Marshall, "Chelsea Summer," *PAJ* no.60, vol. XX, no. 3 (September, 1998): 60.
33. Moffatt in Conomos and Caputo, "*BEDEVIL*," 28.
34. Comolli describes the capturing power of a fiction "as relying on the fact that its fictive character is known and recognized from the start, that it is above all an apparatus of deception and thus that it postulates a spectator who is not easily but *difficultly* deceivable . . . one who is complicit, willing to 'go along,'" "Machines of the Visible," *The Cinematic Apparatus,* ed. Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: Macmillan, 1980), 140.
35. E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze,* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xix.
36. "Koori" is a term that Aboriginal people in New South Wales (and sometimes Victoria) use to refer to themselves. The interviewers should have used the term "Murri" in relation to Moffatt, whose people are Queensland-based.
37. Conomos and Caputo, *"BEDEVIL,"* 28.
38. Ibid., 28.

Abstract In her vividly textured, complicated, and passionate film, *beDevil,* Australian Aboriginal artist and filmmaker Tracey Moffatt avoids easy stereotypes of victims and oppressors. She not only inspects some of the repressed stories of indigenous Australians, but also looks at the bewildered, bedeviled ways in which non-indigenous and indigenous Australians live with each other. Moffatt draws on all aspects of her artistic practice in this feature-length film.

Mark Nicholls

Male Melancholia and Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*

> Whenever he thought of Ellen Olenska, it had been abstractly, serenely, like an imaginary loved one in a book or picture. She had become the complete vision of all that he had missed.
>
> —The Narrator

Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer in *The Age of Innocence*

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Popular discussion surrounding the release of the Edith Wharton adaptation *The Age of Innocence* (1993) paid significant attention either to its departure from, or adherence to, the Scorsesean auteurist canon. But what is arresting about *The Age of Innocence* is not its comparison with key films of the Scorsesean opus but the way the film articulates a profound sense of melancholy surrounding its central male protagonist, Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis).[1] Common to almost all Scorsese films and their central protagonists is the expression of a deep melancholia; in *The Age of Innocence* this melancholia is central to its hero's experience of loss, which is celebrated and aestheticized.[2] Unlike the horrific deprivation suffered by the tragic hero, loss for the male melancholic is both seductive and empowering. Rather than being crippled by the kind of moral punishment exacted upon the tragic hero or the heroine of the woman's melodrama, the male melancholic appears at the end of his narrative almost as if in a state of grace, strangely beautiful in his self-sacrifice. There is something exquisitely civilized about Newland Archer walking off into the distance of a Paris street, having denied himself a final reunion with the woman "he wanted most."[3] The concern of this article is to explore the workings of male melancholia in *The Age of Innocence*. Focusing on key scenes which plot the relationship between Newland Archer and his "lost object," Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), I want to demonstrate how the male melancholic is able to adopt an emotional stance historically gendered as feminine, yet retain his privileged position of power and authority. Essential to an understanding of Scorsese's films in particular, male melancholia tells us a great deal about the workings of cinematic masculinity in general.[4]

The Age of Innocence is a representation of the male melancholic imagination par excellence, and Newland Archer is Scorsese's most patent male melancholic. His journey through the film represents a compulsive search for loss and an obsessive care to preserve and encrypt the significance of that loss. Loss is the centerpiece of his fantasy of distance and separation from the corrupt and conservative regime he purports to detest. The search for unsatisfied desire, of course, can never end. A prisoner of its cycle, the male melancholic must give up that key object of desire, through which he seeks to attain loss as an escape. He exchanges it for the privileges of conformity with a regime that promises him the last and greatest pleasure of patriarchy—power. The melancholic's power is achieved through the denial of desire, in that desire is aligned with loss of control and *jouissance,* both constituting a profound threat to patriarchy.

It is a mistake, however, to read the narrative of *The Age of Innocence* as moving Newland Archer toward some primary experience of loss. This particular feeling of loss assailed him long before he met Ellen Olenska. It is the loss of the "pre-symbolic," the maternal realm before language and culture, that haunts Newland as the originary/maternal impetus for his endless journey of loss and recovery. The various dramas of plenitude and emptiness that he stages are merely the rearrangement of symbols in search of that state of melancholia that will satisfy him. They are, however, a poor substitute for the revisitation of the original maternal bond that troubles his desires. In this sense, Newland's final rejection of reunification with Ellen Olenska marks the compromised state of desire he must accept as a loyal member of his tribe, just as it restages the original separation from the mother that set him off on his search for it in the first place. What he gives up at this point is nothing new: patriarchy has forbidden it long ago. What he accepts is melancholia, the "pursuit of continuously disappointing adventures and loves," which is the next best thing.[5]

"It invariably happened as everything happened"

The film tells the story of the re-introduction of the scandalous Countess Olenska to late nineteenth-century New York society, returning from her "intolerable" marriage abroad, and causing a great disturbance in the social fabric. Ellen Olenska's "always so flagrant" behavior, and the more recent threat of her divorce, disrupt the hypocritical facade of the polite world. More substantially, her actions destabilize the plans for the forthcoming marriage of Newland Archer and May Welland (Winona Ryder), members of her own family circle. It is Newland Archer, however, who springs to Ellen's defense and aid, enlisting the support of the powerful Van der Luydens (Michael Gough and Alexis Smith) to restore the balance of "tribal order" when, following a dinner invitation to meet Ellen, "New York declined" to attend. Thrown together with Ellen in these affairs, and as her attorney in the divorce case, Newland is attracted to her nonconformity and independence and falls in love with her—despite his impending marriage. There begins his struggle against propriety that culminates in their mad embrace and declarations of love. Just as he declares the impossibility of his marriage ("Do you see me

marrying May now?") a telegram arrives from May, an insightful operator, informing Ellen of the success of Newland's recent attempts to bring forward their marriage. This leaves Newland "buried alive under his future."

Archer now regards married life with May as a personal death. Separated from Ellen for a year or so, he has lost none of his desire for her. Denial has sharpened his passion. At their first reunion, Ellen confirms that her feelings are reciprocal, promising him that she will not return to her husband in Europe. "That's no life for you," Newland remarks. "It is," she replies, "as long as it's part of yours." However, tribal forces, orchestrated by the silent and unseen hand of May, are at work to bring about their separation. As Newland's desire for escape with Ellen reaches its height, he and May hold their first dinner—a "farewell" for the Countess Olenska. May towers over Newland as they discuss the "success" of the party. Implicit in May's demeanor is the success of her subtle eradication of Ellen (she has informed Newland of her pregnancy) from the tribe and the danger Ellen presented in her influence over Newland.

Many years later Newland, 57 years old and recently widowed, has the opportunity to meet Ellen again through the intervention of his son, Ted (Robert Sean Leonard), in Paris. Ted reveals that in his last conversation with May, before she died, she discussed the affair and her role in it. With Newland, she assured Ted and his brothers and sisters, they would be "safe," as Ted repeats to his father, "because once, when she asked you, you gave up the thing you wanted most." As the master of self-denial, Newland assures Ted that he did not need to be "asked." Perversely, moved by May's missive from the grave, Newland Archer refuses to see Ellen, the one "thing" in the world he most desired.

The Ghost and Mr. Archer

The social threat represented by Ellen Olenska creates the disturbance that opens the narrative. What Newland Archer finds, or believes he finds, when he enters the opera box in which she is being paraded, is arguably a dead body—the most abject of all "things."[6] "You have been away a very long time," says Newland, responding to one of her many slight breaches of *comme il faut*. Ellen replies accordingly: "Oh, centuries and centuries. So long, I'm sure I'm dead and buried and this dear old place is heaven."

Clearly she is not dead and the purpose of this supposition is not to assert that she is, in the reality of the narrative, some ghostly presence wandering through Scorsese's film. What it highlights, however, is that to both Newland and the tribe, Ellen must be attributed with a taboo not unlike the taboo on the dead. Due to her foreign marriage, her unconventional habits, her tendency to consort with undesirable persons, and general reputation for immorality, Ellen is dead to proper society for all intents and purposes. She may not be touched; it is the job of the tribal organization to convince Newland of it—that she is lost to him.[7]

Newland (Daniel Day-Lewis) dances with his fiancée May (Winona Ryder).

Newland's impression of the situation relies on the very idea that Ellen is dead/absent. It is certainly a condition of his ambivalence toward her that he should think her dead. Ellen's "death" is certainly prominent in his thoughts and desires. When, just before the telegram announcement of the May/Newland marriage plans, Grannie Mingott (Miriam Margolyes) argues the case for Ellen's return to Europe, Newland bursts out with the cry that he "would rather see her dead." A year and a half later, following his marriage, the narrator describes Newland's detachment when hearing of

Ellen, "as if listening to reminiscences of someone long dead." In the face of his temporary reversion to "his old inherited ideas about marriage," after "the madness with Madame Olenska":

> Archer trained himself to remember it as the last of his discarded experiments. She remained in his memory simply as the most plaintive and poignant of a line of ghosts.

In this regard, Newland accepts the implications of her taboo status as established by the tribe. To him, however, she is only dead in the sense that death signifies a state of conceptual absence. His model of desire relies on such a seemingly permanent absence, but not in so far as it puts her beyond his touch. It is only within this presence/absence dynamic that his desire can be expressed. Nevertheless, his willingness to conceive of Ellen's death is tempered by his ambivalence toward his attachment to the idea of loss, if not also his attachment to Ellen herself. Thus Newland, rejecting mourning, immerses himself within a space of fantasy obsession that hides his "secret heart of woes." The attempts made by the New York tribe, throughout the film, to rally around May and block Newland's access to Ellen thus appear like the unsuccessful agents of "reality-testing" mentioned by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia." In the face of "puzzling" obscurity and opposition, they fail to convince the patient that "the loved object no longer exists."[8] In the melancholic struggle over the object something other than "normal mourning" takes place and is re-staged, not in conscious reality, but in the ego, the melancholic's fantasy world.[9]

The melancholic struggle over Ellen Olenska is like a tribal war that dictates the terms of obedience for its members through an obsession with objects.[10] An analysis of key scenes between Newland and Ellen reflects upon the nature of this fantasyscape and the staging of melancholia. My argument is that the representation of melancholia in *The Age of Innocence* deals with two relationships: first, and most importantly, a relationship and dialogue with an object of ideal loss (Ellen) staged in the melancholic's fantasy scenario or crypt; and secondly, with the regime of object reality that is the tribal group, and how its assertion of what the narrator calls its "set of arbitrary signs" informs this complex state of melancholia.

Conversations With a Lost Object

The Van der Luyden dinner party provides Newland with his first significant discussion with Ellen, establishing a number of motifs that mark their later encounters. As Newland wanders the room alone and finally sits, Scorsese's slow-motion camera emphasizes Ellen's unconventional crossing of the room—"to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another"—as if magically drawing her to Newland. Marked by this breach of etiquette, the scene establishes Ellen's unconventionality, the attraction it has for Archer, and the way it constructs an intimacy between them. As the exchange makes clear, Ellen possesses the qualities of rebellion he desires for himself, qualities that May clearly does not possess. Accompanied on the soundtrack by the second movement of Beethoven's *Pathetique* sonata,[11] the couple talks, their conversation coming around to the characteristics of the Countess that Newland finds most appealing and moving—her grief and sense of sorrow. The suggestion of her past punishment at the hands of her husband adds a touch of tragedy to her tale of loss. Both Newland's melancholic expression and the *Pathetique* sonata are responses to, and aestheticizations of, his sorrow. The melancholic relies upon such expressions as a source of identification with grief and a manifestation of his sensitivity, which he values so highly. Both operate to separate Newland from others and at the same time increase his intimacy with Ellen. Certainly, his public display of association with Ellen's unconventional behavior goes a long way toward satisfying his desire to be seen as similarly rebellious in the pursuit of his more noble cause—that of his own moral vision.

The following scene repeats the motifs of the previous: an initial unconventional act/comment, a lively and flirtatious banter, Ellen's expressions of sadness and need leading to their increased intimacy. These interactions emphasize Newland's assumption of his noble cause. Distinguishing himself from the ever-interloping Julius Beaufort (Stuart Wilson), who has suggested Ellen's street to be unfashionable, and others like him "who have nothing more serious to consider," Newland assumes the melancholic's favorite role of social and moral critic. Both here and in the later scene of divorce discussion, he shows himself as critic but also reader of the New York social "labyrinth" and its "smooth hypocrisies." "Everything is labeled. But everybody is not," he informs her. In this, he draws on his

bourgeois and highly self-conscious connoisseurship ("I know one or two painters. . . . Whenever I'm in Paris or London I never miss an exhibition. I try to keep up") to reveal his fascination with objects and signs, and his assumption that he has the ability to read and explain them. The need Ellen expresses gives him the opportunity to demonstrate the qualities of the critic from within; he is in possession of a superior moral code and, as Freud says of the melancholic, "a keener eye for the truth."[12]

Despite this ability, which he loves to exercise around Ellen, Newland still allows himself to engage in a game of exchange with her over positions of strength and weakness. The slight confusion and bewilderment he betrays when surveying her works of art suggest that Ellen introduces much to Newland's conventional world that he does not comprehend. Following his rather sycophantic assertion concerning the importance of the Van der Luydens in New York society, Ellen's effortless observation on the workings of this importance fascinates him. In an almost mocking condescension to his pretensions towards superior knowledge, she backs off: "But of course you must tell me." Intrigued by her insight, Archer laughs—"No, it's you telling me." Clearly, Newland has much to learn from Ellen and her ability to teach/show him is the source of his personal growth. As he says to her over a year later, "You gave me my first glimpse of a real life and then told me to go on with a false one." The dialectic suggests an essential factor in the construction of the crypt of melancholia that maintains its fantasy of desire by upholding a dialogue with the lost object, in this case a dialogue that took place a year ago. The exchange and appropriation of each other's positions of strength and weakness over such social understandings, and later over aspects of advice, noble sacrifice, love, grief, and finally loss, speak more directly of the melancholic's own internal monologue rather than of a dialogue with another person, so coated as they are with the marks of his desire and his narcissism. The lively banter or desperate and heated exchange that make up Newland's encounters with Ellen demonstrate the melancholic's tendency to give voice to or speak for his object-loss, for whom he grieves (hence his ability to exchange and appropriate positions with Ellen). His final objective, it must be remembered, is the complete devouring of the lost object,[13] to the extent that he may demonstrate, in his grieving, her constitutional loss as his own. In his display of loss, the melancholic is always living in the shadow of the other.

Newland and the Countess Olenska battle temptation.

We might accept the premise that the encounters between Newland and Ellen are, at least on one level, dialogues between an ego and an incorporated lost object. Accordingly we should not be surprised that the second speaker in this narcissistic fantasy can be occasionally hostile. Newland Archer's faith in causes outside those sanctioned by his tribal group is such that this faith must be regularly tested. Just as Ellen threatens convention so, too, she arouses Newland's interests in unconventionality. In their late-night meeting in a ghostly room adorned and illuminated by nothing but a log fire, Ellen challenges Newland's allegiances and motivations. The scene and that following it, like feelings of ambivalence arising out of a loss, test the love of the ego remaining behind to mourn the lost object. Their initial small talk about painters and exhibitions sets the theme of the encounter, which is to determine Newland's position and loyalties. Does he side with Ellen or with those who represent convention

and custom? The question further serves to answer the growing suspicion, in Ellen, that Newland is in love with her.

Her mocking desire "to become a complete American and try to be like everybody else" is, of course, repugnant to him—"I don't think you'll ever be quite like everybody else," he says. Her suggestion, however, is more likely calculated to determine how much *Newland* is going "to try to be like everybody else." The tight shot/reverse-shot strategy Scorsese employs, as they discuss the Count's "vile" letter, emphasizes the intimacy and the severity of the situation. There is clearly something important at stake. Recalling that he has just failed to assure his senior legal partner, Letterblair (Norman Lloyd), that he will press for the divorce, Newland's ambivalence toward the threat Ellen holds for him induces him to do just the opposite. Although seemingly indifferent to social dictates, in their encounters Newland expresses to Ellen the very dread associated with taboo violation. He constantly informs her of the way the group and others react to her outrages. This is hardly the figure he likes to cut for himself, and she is left to determine his real position. Or rather, in accordance with Newland's fantasies as played out in these scenes, he must have an opportunity to display his ultimate rejection of social conformity. His near use of the word "unpleasant," scorned by Ellen in a previous scene, is interrupted by the camera's tilted point-of-view shot, moving into close-up from her ringless hand to her face. She says nothing, but her look suggests castigation. In their previous meeting, Newland informed her that "all the older women like and admire you, they want to help." To which she replied, "I know, so long as they don't hear anything unpleasant." Her look here, like another she gives a second later when Newland implies concurrence with the rumors about her, suggests anger and disappointment. Furthermore, in her look there is an element of interrogation as to Newland's position on the situation:

> Ellen: What harm could accusations like that do me here?
>
> Archer: Perhaps more harm than anywhere else. Our legislation favors divorce but our social customs don't.
>
> Ellen: Yes. So my family tells me. Our family: you'll be my cousin soon. And you agree with them?

Newland has demonstrated that he does not agree with them. In standing up, he implies this. Reeling from the blow of accusation contained in the words "our family," however, he continues to excuse his position. He does this fearing the very "freedom" Ellen hopes to gain and the threat it poses to his desire to suffer the exquisite torment of loss—that is, to be the male melancholic. The fact that Ellen then so readily agrees to his suggestion that she remain married surprises him for two reasons: it undoes something of his idealization of her and it marks the failure of his secret desire. If she insists on the divorce, it suggests that she loves him. Newland marks his failure in this, in his most passionate gesture toward her to date, by taking and kissing her hands. "I do want to help you," he says. In her reply, before Newland departs, Ellen says, "You do help me. Good night, cousin." Ellen both confirms the failure of his desire and plays the vital role of the loved object denying the satisfaction of desire that always, somewhat perversely, marks the most intensely romantic scenes in Scorsese's films. The cutting-off of desire suggests "the farewell scene" upon which the melancholic's fantasy relies. Scorsese's device, however, is to constantly repeat it, as the next scene does, by staging an equivalent farewell scene from Dion Boucicault's play *The Shaugraun*.

Newland loves the "farewell scene." As he tells Ellen, "I usually leave the theater after that scene to take the picture away with me." Thus he is prepared to go to extreme lengths to preserve its effect and to cultivate it in his own life. A number of their encounters, including the theater scene, are structured like farewell scenes, building up toward the final farewell near the end of the film. Ellen thanks Newland for his advice of the previous night, thus confirming that his efforts have ensured their separation. The melancholic relies heavily upon such scenes to remind him of the absence of, and separation from, desire; it is from this denial of desire that he derives utmost satisfaction.

Scorsese emphasizes the isolation of Newland and Ellen from the rest of the group in Regina Beaufort's theater box in two ways: first, by means of an iris filter encircling them, and second, by eliminating all noises on the soundtrack save their own voices. Having never mentioned the yellow roses Newland sent her, Ellen now alludes to them in the context of the play they have been watching. For Ellen, they are the gesture of a lover made in lieu of the consummation of his passion. They also mark the confirmation of his perpetually restrained desire. Newland, perhaps mistaking her meaning, thrills at her mentioning it. According to his fantasy scenario, she is calling him her "lover." At the mention of May's absence, Ellen offers Newland the opportunity to show what sort of lover he

is: "And what do you do while May is away?" "I do my work," replies Newland, somewhat off-balance. In a verbal gesture of similar effect to that of calling him "cousin," as she did in the previous scene, Ellen shows her disappointment in the confirmation of her suspicions by thanking him profusely for his advice. Scorsese backs up the significance of this gesture with a change in lighting and sound that returns the scene to "normal." In effect, Newland's lost object has called him "love" and he can only mark its impossibility—a fact that he confirms by leaving the theater, yet again, to take the picture away with him. On the next day, of course, he further marks the impossibility of his desire by searching the city for yellow roses. Contemporary etiquette suggests that yellow roses ambivalently signify both passion and friendship. Accordingly they represent a highly satisfactory standing order for the unrequiting lover. Satisfying the pleasure of his search is not part of Newland's desire—his searches always have the effect of never arriving, never finishing. The roses cannot be found anywhere in the city and when presenting themselves in plenitude two days later, "Newland Archer passed them by."

Hide and Seek

The encounters between Newland and Ellen so far set up a pattern that will play itself out to the end of the first half of the film, which is marked by Newland's marriage to May. It is a pattern of presence and absence, attraction and repulsion, which reflects the melancholic's predilection for a form of desire dependent upon the palpability of an absence. Through this game Newland gains compensation for his originary experience of deprivation in his stage-managing of denial. Ultimately building towards the moment when he must forsake Ellen and marry May, the representation of the game leans toward the predominance of absence.

Following the play, Newland writes to Ellen in order to ask to see her; she does not reply immediately, but later responds by explaining that she has run away with the Van der Luydens to Skuytercliff. Her letter hints that he should follow, and he does. When they meet, she expresses an intimate happiness both at seeing him, ("I knew you'd come") and with his company ("I can't feel unhappy when you're here"). In stark contrast to her mood of their previous encounters, Ellen, here, seems to satisfy Newland's curiosities about her feelings for him. His response to her last expression is almost hostile, however: "I shan't be here long." Having come so far, at some considerable effort, her loving response threatens to undermine the game of catch-up around which he stages his romantic fantasies. His doubtless carefully rehearsed opening line, "I came to see what you were running away from," provides him with the excuse he feels he needs to follow her and, like T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, "to force the moment to its crisis."[14] He allows himself to believe that she is running away from him and uses this repulsion-energy to feed his presence/absence game—and to follow her. He does not consider that she may be fleeing for reasons other than to drag him along behind her. Later, in the Patroon house at Skuytercliff, standing at a distance from Ellen, he turns away from her and presses the question again: "You must tell me what you're running from." He receives no answer, but imagines the answer he wants. In his fantasy he closes his eyes, as he did at the farewell scene of the play (seemingly to withstand the emotional assault) as Ellen moves toward him and embraces him from behind. In this gesture she seems to answer him, "I am running away because, as you suspected, I am in love with you." As he turns to meet her embrace, the moment is revealed as imaginary. Ellen sits alone, cold and isolated in her chair, seemingly—due to the shot scale—smaller and further away than before. Noticing Beaufort approaching, Newland mocks himself and, at the same time, congratulates himself on his second, if somewhat tardy, insight. The realization, following his suspicion of desire in Ellen, allows him to reverse the poles of attraction and propel himself away from her. In the same mood, he ignores her later letter requesting a chance to explain her actions, and moves off into a state of negative desire toward May in Florida.

It is not that Newland merely misreads his encounters with Ellen. He may not believe her protestation of ignorance as to Beaufort's arrival but he cannot have missed the fact that, following his brief dream of Ellen's embrace, she performs the gesture in reality, virtually repeating his own version. She has clearly stated her desire for him. Her actions come too close to the satisfaction of desire for Newland, who accordingly latches onto a narrative of rivalry involving Beaufort rather than face the prospect of being involved in a relationship of reciprocated love. Rejecting these realities and temporarily invoking the melancholic's favorite bluff of pretending not to desire that which other men desire, Newland throws open the door to Beaufort, "Hello, Beaufort! This way! Madame Olenska was expecting you." This bluff not only serves to deny the satisfaction of desire but to effect his separation from the group as "a man apart." His entire narrative is about the pretense that he is above common tribal desires, whereas, in fact, it is

these desires which correspond to his own core desire—conformity with the group. Later that night, masochistically cocooned by the perfect safety of his newest delusions about Ellen, he can crumple up her note requesting a chance to explain, plan his flight to May and mourn the future he is shoring up—despite its foreboding aspects, there is comfort in the melancholic's crypt:

> That night he did not take the customary comfort in his monthly shipment of books from London. The taste of the usual was like cinders in his mouth, and there were moments when he felt as if he were being buried alive under his future.

Having taken the steps with May and Grannie Mingott which will further put Ellen out of reach, he can now express an ardent wish to see her. Newland does so following the scene with Catherine Mingott in which the details of his Florida enchantments are made clear to Ellen. Newland is left standing between the two "intrepid" women looking like an embarrassed schoolboy. This short scene acts as a prelude to the last scene prior to Newland's marriage to May that begins the second half of the film. It is an intense meeting with Ellen that summarizes the various characteristics of their relationship. Furthermore, in its unusual changes of mood, the scene suggests something of its unreal nature as a reworking of Newland's fantasy scenario based on an originary experience of profound loss.

Another Woman

Standing before a mantle, in almost mirror symmetry, Newland and Ellen accuse each other of disloyalty. In Newland's suspicion of Ellen's collaboration with Catherine to bring about her return to the Count, Newland hints at Ellen's blocking of their consummation. Ellen returns the accusation, with rather more force, by mentioning Newland's collaboration with Catherine in order to advance his marriage to May. Defending himself by stressing May's nobility in allowing him "time to give her up for another woman," Newland sets himself up for a frustrating parody. By referring to "this other woman," Ellen perpetuates the discussion of desire in the third person, although she clearly understands that person to be herself. Newland seems vaguely annoyed at this but does not point out the fact immediately. Instead he uses it to begin his advance, which is gratifyingly put down by Ellen, "Don't make love to me. Too many people have done that." By maintaining the idea of "this other woman" in the third person, the dialogue satisfies the melancholic's penchant for keeping desire and its naming in the abstract. Even at this late stage, the melancholic's fantasy works hard to locate desire somewhere else. Furthermore, the location of that object of desire—as temporarily somewhere else and someone other than Ellen—parodies the way in which this melancholy fantasyscape allows for the fluidity of roles and identity. This has been discussed above, in relation to the constant exchange of positions between Ellen and Newland.

The most significant of these exchanges occurs in a discussion of "self-sacrifice." Raising the idea that he would have married her had it been "possible," Ellen begins an exchange of mutual accusation as to who had made it "impossible." Both present their position as determined by the motive of acting "for the sake" of the other. Newland has encouraged Ellen not to divorce in order to save her from scandal. Ellen has agreed to it to save Newland and May from association with that scandal which, otherwise, she had no need to fear. A summary of this "tit for tat" exchange might have each of them saying "I expressed my love for you by denying myself the possibility of consummating it." This is how the melancholic loves and how he fantasizes that his love-object loves. Seemingly at an impasse, the regime of denial breaks down, necessitating their embrace until this regime can again be reinstated.

It is surprising that Newland does not lead the retreat but presses the realms of the possible: "Do you see me marrying May now?" It is a bluff, however, standing as a response to what has been, in effect, an accusation of his greatest weakness—self-deprivation. Ellen, who has argued this all along, exposes his delusion: "You say that because it is the easiest thing to say at this moment, not because it's true." With his blocking of their union so solidly executed, he can afford to add another layer to his fantasy. At this point the mood of the scene appears to alter to suit this new layer, as Ellen's characterization seems also to change. Having argued so persuasively that Newland has made their union impossible, she takes a new tack. In a long speech she outlines his goodness and nobility of character, which are those very things she has just used to argue against him. In the course of the scene her role—subject to Newland's fantasy—has changed again, as it has in numerous other scenes. Once again they have exchanged positions, and Newland has attributed his strategy of desire to her while taking the role of innocent for himself. Ellen's speech might have been written for her by Newland. It stands both as Newland's

own credo and as a justification of his conformist behavior. It comes seemingly from the lips of her whom, in this regard, he respects the most:

> Newland, you couldn't be happy if it meant being cruel. If we act in any other way I'll be making you act against what I love in you most. And I can't go back to that way of thinking. Don't you see? I can't love you unless I give you up.

The embrace/pose they take up during the last speech is an unusually awkward one. On one level it suggests the embrace of two Victorian upper middle-class lovers whose union cannot be—although Ellen represents more the "new woman." Beginning with the delicacy of foot kissing, the scene ends amid the rippling flounces of Ellen's dress, keeping lips and eyes and cheeks at a safe distance. On another level, it suggests the far greater intimacy and power of the fetal pose, with Newland half-winding around and clinging to Ellen's lap-as-womb as she curls around him in a yin-yang formation. It is a striking image of dominance and submission that literalizes the very essence of the melancholic's loss. This is the loss he longs for, on one hand, and runs from, on the other.

The key to reading this pose is given by the visual suggestion of the tiger-skin rug on the floor under Ellen's feet. The embrace of the two lovers is by this motif associated with the cheek-to-cheek pose of the two protagonists in Frenand Khnopff's *L'Art, les caresses ou le Sphinx* that hangs over the mantle. This striking image of Oedipus and the Sphinx/mother he must renounce establishes the scene. Newland stands to the left of the screen below a similarly dark-haired Oedipus; Ellen to the right of screen below a similarly fair-haired Sphinx. Like their representatives in the painting, Ellen and Newland come together in this scene in an embrace that, like the painting, emphasizes a cheek-to-cheek pose. Both scenes stress not the destruction of the Sphinx by Oedipus, but his undeniable and obsessive attachment to the other whom he must destroy. Thus the painting stresses the essence of Newland's desire in the other/Ellen and its impossibility that are the key themes of the scene and of the film.

A scene with Ellen some 18 months after Newland's marriage to May seems to speak of the melancholic's pleading with his now mourned object Ellen, begging her not to desert him. Assuring him, and his heavy sighs, that she will not go back to Europe, Ellen leaves Newland as the camera and editing fades her image from sight sooner than she can stroll off the set.

The embrace

The narration stresses the extremity of devotion to this constantly fading desire:

> He would see her again at the theater or at a reception. Perhaps he might be seated next to her, perhaps they might have another time alone, somewhere, but he could not live without seeing her.

Following Ellen's constant assurances throughout the scene, Enya's rendition of "Marble Halls" on the soundtrack helps to point, once again, to the narcissistic component of the scene, undermining the integrity of his sublimation and his ultimate allegiance to the pre-symbolic bond. The haunting female voice seems to be mirroring the resonances of his fantasy: "But I also dreamt which charmed me most that you loved me still the same." Newland Archer can never really approach such sublimation. His primary allegiance to the patriarchal values of the tribe allows him, in the end, to accept the loss of Ellen, without relinquishing the right to mourn her. This secured, following the death of May years later, Newland has no need to be reunited with Ellen at the end of the film. His refusal to meet her in Paris is an extravagant

and highly self-conscious gesture designed to reconfirm his original sacrifice. It represents the point at which the desires of the tribe and the melancholic finally and inevitably become one. May's deathbed revelations to son Ted, that Newland had given up Ellen, play a vital role. Newland is inexpressibly moved by his assumption that May had "guessed, and pitied" him. The effect of this perhaps dubious assumption on Newland is to play directly into his pattern of desire. May's "pity" confirms the reality of both his fantasy and his sacrifice. For Newland to see Ellen would be to renounce that sacrifice. It would threaten to disturb the solidity of the melancholic's crypt, his most precious possession, in which both he and his object-loss lie buried in the ecstasy of stasis. This is the full and extravagant compensation payable to the male melancholic who gives up his forbidden object.

The process of devouring or incorporation in the film's narrative is instructive of its own creative process, that is to say Scorsese's adaptation of Edith Wharton's prose, and its most significant contribution to the question of cinematic masculinity. Newland's desire to ingest Ellen's experience of loss and then to give voice to that experience is Scorsese's own. Pam Cook has not been alone amongst critics who have seen Scorsese's film as altering the perspective of Wharton's novel from a story about women into a story about men.[15] However we might read the film as a satisfactory response to the novel, it is certainly a melancholic response. Scorsese, like his hero Newland, takes the tale of a sad, lovely, and damaged woman and makes it his own. Wharton's loss becomes Scorsese's. This may cause certain fault lines to appear in the performance—the occluded voice cannot be silenced and will make itself apparent on the surface of the text as voiceover narration—but this will not perturb the melancholic performer. The significance of this tale of male melancholia emerging from the creation of female loss is that it can only ever be thus. Melancholia in the cinema may always be seeking a role in the representation of masculinity but it always originates in a notion of loss-ridden femininity. Male melancholia cannot exist without the maternal/feminine antecedent, nor can it forget that origin. The question of whether the performance of male melancholia is repressive within, or liberating from, the patriarchal imperative is an interesting but unanswerable one. What the melancholic performance says is that masculinity cannot account for itself without reference to the maternal/feminine—just as Scorsese's text is inevitably bound to Wharton's.

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Notes

1. I have used the word "melancholic" in the term "the male melancholic" according to its common use as a noun among writers on melancholia and as defined in both the Oxford English and Webster's dictionaries. As is common also among contemporary writers on melancholia, I have favored the use of the word "melancholia" with its suggestion of psychiatric disease over "melancholy," which is a distinction particular to the English language suggesting a habitual sadness. I have used "melancholy" to describe a mood or atmosphere in a specific film or group of films under discussion.
2. For my purposes the most significant consideration of melancholia is Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Pelican Freud Library Volume 11, On Metapsychology,* ed. A. Richards, trans. James Strachey (Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin, 1984). Writings subsequent to Freud's work on the subject such as Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Susan Sontag, "Introduction," in *Walter Benjamin: One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: Verso, 1985); and especially Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia,* trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) have been instrumental to my reading of the melancholic subject in the cinema.
3. There has been very little written about the films of Martin Scorsese in relation to melancholia despite the significance of melancholia in his films. Notions of melancholic "memory" and "desire" are raised in Lesley Stern, *The Scorsese Connection* (London: BFI, 1995), but while implicit to her reading of Scorsese's heroes, an extended consideration of male melancholia in Scorsese is not a central concern.
4. Over the past two decades film theorists have explained masculinity in relation to a number of psychoanalytically based concepts. This body of work includes discussions of masculinity in relation to sadism and fetishism (Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [London: Macmillan, 1989]), masochism (Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* [New York: Routledge, 1992], Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988]), hysteria (Barbara Creed, "Phallic Panic: Male Hysteria and *Dead Ringers,*" *Screen,* vol. 31, no. 2 [1990]: 107-128, and Lynn Kirby, "Male Hysteria and Early Cinema," *Camera Obscura* 17, [1988]: 113-131), oedipal relationships (Laura Mulvey), and masculine protest (Scott Bukatman, "Paralysis in Motion: Jerry Lewis's Life as a Man," *Camera Obscura* 17 [1988]: 195-205). There have been very few substantial discussions of male melancholia in the cinema. The references to melancholia are almost always made in the context of discus-

sion about other issues. Feminists interested in the cinema have considered melancholia in relation to issues of femininity (Vicky Lebeau, *Lost Angels: Psychoanalysis and Cinema* [London: Routledge, 1995], Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988]) and this work has been extended by recent work on ghosts in the cinema (Katherine Fowkes, *Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998]).

5. Kristeva, *Black Sun,* 13.
6. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3ff.
7. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo,* trans. James Strachey (London: J. Routledge & Kegan, 1961), 1-17.
8. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 253.
9. cf. Stern, *The Scorsese Connection,* 224.
10. See R.B. Heilmann's definition of melodrama as "a conflict between men and things," from his *Tragedy and Melodrama,* as quoted in Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures,* 41.
11. Beethoven, Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, *Pathetique*.
12. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 255.
13. "Introducing all or part of a love object or a thing into one's body," Nicolas Abraham & Maria Torok, "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation," in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis,* ed. N. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 126.
14. T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry,* 3rd edition, ed. A. Allison and H. Barrows (New York: Norton and Company, 1983), 994-997.
15. Pam Cook, "*The Age of Innocence*-Review," *Sight and Sound* (February, 1994): 46.

Abstract Through an analysis of Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence,* this article proposes a psychoanalytically based theory of male melancholia. Grounded in the cultural ambiguities of loss and masculinity, melancholia is revealed as an essential tool for reading Scorsese's film and for understanding representations of male desire in the cinema.

Reviews

Adaptation

Director: Spike Jonze. Producers: Edward Saxon, Vincent Landay, and Jonathan Demme. Writer: Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman. Cinematographer: Lance Acord. Editor: Eric Zumbrunnen. Music: Carter Burwell. Columbia Pictures.

In the conclusion to his seminal study of autoeroticism, Havelock Ellis hypothesized, "it is impossible to say what the finest elements in art, in morals, in civilization generally, may not really be rooted in an autoerotic impulse."[1] A century later, director Spike Jonze and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman rooted their film *Adaptation*'s intertextual mental masturbation in autoerotic fantasy. Legible as a gimmicky self-reflexive exercise, a comedy of narcissistic neurosis, or a profound self-portrait of artistic endeavor, *Adaptation* productively narrativizes masturbation's myriad associations, pathologies, and possibilities.

Adaptation (2002) portrays the creative process as the story, written accurately or not, of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's (Nicolas Cage) struggle with his follow-up project to *Being John Malkovich* (1999). He has been hired to adapt *The Orchid Thief* by *New Yorker* reporter/essayist Susan Orlean, but the source book —a sprawling profile of Florida poacher and horticulturist John Laroche—has no drama and almost no plot; Charlie[2] faces the daunting task of translating a nonfiction book into a non-documentary film. Although his foray into adaptation presents a chance for him to "get out of [his] own head," (as his semi-girlfriend Amelia observes), the script becomes even more personal than his original works.

In the midst of his self-loathing and his writer's block, Charlie masturbates three times onscreen, and his masturbatory reveries are exposed to the spectator. The first is a fantasy sequence that tricks the spectator—or perhaps more accurately foreshadows the film's final third—by presenting an increasingly implausible scenario as if it is really happening. Charlie has taken an enthusiastic red-headed waitress (Judy Greer) to an orchid show in Santa Barbara, where she leads him

The blank page: Charlie (Nicholas Cage) sets about the solitary act of writing.

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into the expo hall's woodsy backyard and takes off her shirt, revealing her breasts. The sequence is presented without any textual markers that we should not believe it, except that a schlub like Charlie wouldn't get a girl like this so easily. The sequence is abruptly interrupted, however, by a jump cut to Charlie's dark bedroom as his fictitious twin brother Donald (also Cage) enters, talking. Quickly, the spectator realizes that Charlie was imagining the prior sequence and that Donald has walked in on a jerk-off session.

The two subsequent masturbation scenes come without this elaborate hoax and are accompanied by fantasies marked as such by the film. After a brief scene of Charlie and studio executive Valerie Thomas (Tilda Swinton) cuddling in bed as she proclaims his genius upon reading the script, which he has not yet written, there is a jump cut to a shot of the two of them fucking, followed by a shot of his legs kicking, alone, off the edge of his bed. In the third instance, Charlie imagines a conversation with Susan's (Meryl Streep) dust-jacket photo and then envisions her coming to life and caressing him. Much like his mental debate about whether to have a coffee and banana-nut muffin before he starts writing or to work toward these treats as rewards, Charlie masturbates as a form of procrastination that both postpones and inspires the writing process, and allows him to clear his head and focus his work.

Many of the reviews of the film have focused on its meta-structures and self-referentiality, but I argue that the film offers a more substantive and affecting meditation on the personal struggle of creation than such a reading indicates. As the various social and medical histories of onanism have demonstrated, self-stimulation has been conceived as the sinful waste of seed, the germ of madness, the symptom of neurosis, and the sublimated inspiration of art.[3] Masturbation exemplifies *Adaptation* protagonist Charlie Kaufman's self-loathing and his inability to consummate a social sexual relationship. But it also provides the fantasy seed that enables his writing process, when inspiration comes in bursts of *jouissance* as Charlie spouts frantic streams of ideas to himself via his hand-held tape recorder. Charlie's workflow makes this personal film accessible to audience members who identify with both Charlie's writerly frustrations and his ecstatic moments of release.

Perhaps it is ironic that masturbation, a non-procreative mode of sexual activity, should be considered fundamental to the creative process. But autoeroticism may also be an apt metaphor for writing, which is typically a process performed in isolation. The most comprehensive cultural history of the topic, Thomas Laqueur's *Solitary Sex,* exerts relatively little energy pondering the relations between the act of creation and the act of self-stimulation. Yet, in positioning autoeroticism as a modern form of sexuality, the essential elements of masturbation that Laqueur outlines—imagination, excess, solitude, and privacy—also hold for many artists, especially literary ones.[4] Several years earlier, Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario II justified their anthology *Solitary Pleasures* with nearly hyperbolic panache:

> Beyond the constraints of orthodox reproductive practices, solitary pleasure is a fundamentally generative form of sexual behavior, deeply implicated in the creative process and therefore basic to much that is good and enriching in human life.[5]

But despite these theorizations of autoeroticism as productive and the pervasive assumption that "everybody does it," masturbation has yet to get much respect. The act appears rather infrequently in feature films, which makes its centrality in Charlie's writing process and in Jonze and Kaufman's plotting of the film all the more remarkable. *Adaptation's* play with delusions, depression, and split personalities suggests a continuation of the history of masturbation as a sign of mental disorder. Although the evaluations of self-abuse that dominated from 1712 to the early 1900s have now become outmoded within the medical and psychological disciplines, they continue to inform cultural depictions of masturbation. And, as Laqueur points out, despite the reclamation of masturbation as healthy and liberating during the 1970s feminist boom of sexual self-help and self-love, masturbation—particularly male masturbation—has remained the stuff of low comedy.[6]

The comic conflation of madness and masturbation may be most famously scripted in Philip Roth's 1967 novel *Portnoy's Complaint,* a written therapy session in which the narrator recounts his obsessive self-manhandling, along with his Oedipal tendencies. Although not exactly an adaptation of Roth's novel, these themes resurfaced in the independent film *Spanking the Monkey* (1994). Five years earlier *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) presented James Spader's character as a pervert whose "problem" allowed him to become aroused only by masturbating to tapes of women talking about their sexual experiences and fantasies. Significantly, although these two films present masturbation as evidence of their comic edginess as well as

outlets for psychosexual kinks, the films do not allow access to the characters' interior thoughts or fantasies. Rather, the spectator can only observe their behavior from a distance. In recent mainstream instances where masturbation is not exactly marginalized, it typically functions as the build-up to a punchline for gross-out comedy, as in *There's Something About Mary* (1998) or *American Pie* (1999). The most pervasive and explicit enactments of masturbatory numbers come, of course, in pornography. There are but a handful of non-hardcore films prior to *Adaptation* that structurally fluctuate between diegetic reality and autoerotic imagination, such as Stan Brakhage's *Flesh of Morning* (1956), Catherine Breillat's *A Real Young Girl* (1976), and Wong Kar-Wai's *Fallen Angels* (1995). In *Adaptation,* Valerie compliments the *Malkovich* script during a business lunch by saying, "I'd love to find a portal into your brain." This is precisely what the onanistic fantasies allow the spectator. Charlie's habit of beating off, while providing moments of sex play and comic relief, also functions to offer the viewer privileged access to his inner life. These scenes also play out as manifestations of his mental and sexual neuroses that have been pronounced by Charlie's recurrent self-berating internal monologue and his inability to perform romantically with Amelia (Cara Seymour).

Although Charlie obviously desires Amelia and looks at her picture as he lies in bed, he does not envision her while masturbating. His object-choices for these fantasies suggest larger narrative implications. The solitary pleasures that Kaufman and Jonze create are fantasies of unattainable social relationships with real people. Although Freud does not draw the connection between autoeroticism and the artistic process, in a rarely cited essay he does comment that creative writers are essentially daydreamers who overcome the adult shame of private thoughts and make their fantasies public.[7] Freud delineates precisely the uses and forms of autoerotic reverie that inspire *Adaptation*. Reading the film as a masturbation narrative allows us to explain the film's meta- and extra-textual referentiality. Charlie's autoerotic fantasies feature a standard crush type (the cute waitress) or extra-diegetically real people (Valerie the studio executive and *Orchid Thief* author Susan Orlean). Perhaps not unlike most people's masturbation reveries and lovesick delusions, the film invents fantastic scenarios involving real people—crushes, celebrities, strangers one encounters in public settings—and the masturbation scenes momentarily enact the possibility of a social or sexual relationship with these familiar but typically unacquainted people.

This is also the basic premise of *Being John Malkovich,* in which Jonze and Kaufman speculate about the life of actor John Malkovich. This previous collaboration, however, takes autoerotic fantasies even further: the characters desire not just knowing or having sex with but *being* John Malkovich. This earlier film presents lonely people who desire to enter another person's body and experience the fantasy life of the actor, even if it consists of mundane activities such as eating toast or ordering towels from a catalogue. In *Malkovich,* puppeteer Craig Schwartz's (John Cusack) marionettes function as prosthetics for him to enact his private romantic scenarios. After Craig has discovered a portal into Malkovich's brain, he allows his wife Lotte (Cameron Diaz) to go on the "ride." Lotte first embodies Malkovich while he is taking a shower and finds fascination in his self-touching, feeling the masculine body she inhabits. Her first trip through masculinity leads her into gender trouble and prompts her to "actualize [herself] as a man" because "for the first time [she] knew who [she] was." Gender and sexuality become slippery, conflated, and contradictory in the film, and soon Lotte desires to embody the actor primarily so that she can bed the woman she desires, Maxine (Catherine Keener); soon Craig uses Malkovich to the same ends. In *Adaptation,* Charlie's twin brother and co-screenwriter Donald is a fantasy alter-ego adept at Hollywood screenplay structure and happy-go-lucky in romance. The desire for a different self in the Kaufman and Jonze films—whether in the form of a different body or different personality—is not necessarily a desire for a metaphoric penetrative capacity but rather for the ecstatic pleasures of inhabiting other bodies and the agency that being other-than-oneself allows.

Although these ecstatic fantasies could potentially be read as gay male or narcissistic desire—more male characters than female ones inhabit Malkovich's body and Charlie's ideal alter-ego is an uninhibited version of himself—the characters' sexual identities, and Charlie's in particular, do not fit easily into the binary of hetero- or homosexual. Rather, they reflect a now obscure sexual identity: that of the masturbator. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has revised the history of sexuality:

> The identity of the masturbator was only one of the sexual identities subsumed, erased, or overridden in the triumph of the heterosexist homo/hetero calculus. . . . [A]s one of the very earliest embodiments of "sexual identity" in the period of the progressive epistemological overloading of sexuality, the masturbator may have been at the cynosural center of a remap-

John Laroche (Chris Cooper) pollinates Susan Orlean's character creatively and sexually.

> ping of individual identity, will, attention, and privacy along modern lines that the reign of "sexuality". . . now lead[s] us to take for granted. It is of more than chronological import that the (lost) identity of the masturbator was the proto-form of modern sexual identity itself.[8]

The autoerotic act in *Adaptation* figures centrally to Charlie's identity as outside of social sexuality and as a fabulator who takes elements from his life and invents scenarios that provide the basis for his writings. Masturbation may seem to inhibit or substitute for normative romantic interactions, but it also removes the threat of rejection and inhibitions to artistic production.

The profundity of *Adaptation* and *Being John Malkovich* lies not in their self-referentiality or celebrity citings, but in the films' portrayals of characters who not only question their aberrant desires but also question their very identity positions in society. Both Kaufman/Jonze films are fundamentally about malaise and inventing personal, ecstatic fantasies. To quote the classified ad for JM, Inc. in *Being John Malkovich,* these characters "want to be someone else" and find imaginative, if metaphysically impossible, ways of doing so. These films present autoerotic fantasies of escapism: the characters embody and engage with idealized others or imagined selves.[9]

Between the prologue voiceover, in which Charlie complains about his fat ass during the credits, and the sequence that portrays four billion years of evolution culminating in Charlie's birth, *Adaptation* begins on the set of *Being John Malkovich*. Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not, the scene being shot is the one of masturbatory megalomania after Malkovich has penetrated his own brain. Charlie lurks about the set, standing within the sightlines of the camera, and the first assistant director and cinematographer, prepping a shot, ask him to leave. Director Spike Jonze does not appear in the scene. For such a self-referential film, Jonze's self-erasure from the set during this sequence is surprising. I suggest that this positions the film as less about reflexivity and meta-construction than about a *personal* creative process. By rendering himself absent from the diegesis as well as shooting the entire film in

a non-auteurist visual style, Jonze foregrounds Kaufman's onanism.

As with *Being John Malkovich*'s use of the extra-textually real Malkovich, Kaufman—and the character Charlie—speculate about the extra-textually real Orlean's dinner parties, her dissatisfaction with her marriage, and her spacious office in the Condé Nast building with floor-to-ceiling windows. We know that such information has been embellished because Kaufman reportedly never met Orlean, nor do such details appear in her book. Susan is portrayed not only as Charlie's muse but as similarly lonely—or even more so. Her sadness and isolation are repeatedly commented upon by her in voiceovers (Streep's narration is movingly pensive in tone and tempo), by other characters, and through juxtaposition, as her image often follows scenes commenting on loneliness. Rather than a goofy writer doppelgänger like Donald, Susan represents a reflection of Charlie's pain, a phantom kindred spirit with whom he longs to connect. Charlie's knowledge of Susan comes from a cover photo and selected introspective passages in her book; he relates to her through her confession that her one great passion is the desire to feel passionately about *something*, anything.

Significantly, the film presents Susan's writing process concurrently with Charlie's. *The Orchid Thief* is written in a first-person, self-reflexive style that alternates between recounted histories of flower poaching, Orlean's personal experiences interviewing Laroche, and considerations of her own relationship to flora. Orlean's introspective moments provide the basis for Charlie's (and Kaufman's) speculations and are the sequences most directly adapted—in fact, quoted—from her book. The film, as J. Hoberman has suggested, portrays the two authors' writing processes in marked contrast, imagining her writing efficiently and eloquently while he struggles to produce words.[10] However, Susan's creative writing process, like Charlie's, also intermingles with personal crisis and realization of her discontent. She does struggle, if not for words, then for vitality. And further, I argue that autoerotic visions influence her literary labor as well.

Susan pictures flowers in full bloom, frequent symbols and tasteful euphemisms for female genitalia, while considering her own sensual dissatisfaction and desire to desire. These images appear in extreme close-ups, and the camera seems to stroke the petals as it pans down them. Because she never expresses same-sex desire, the orchids can be read to stand in for her own genitalia, not another woman's (or, perhaps more accurately, her private parts as imagined by Kaufman and Jonze). As Susan states in voiceover, "orchids are the sexiest flowers on earth," whose name comes from a root word meaning "testicle," making their genital connotation explicit; despite a gendered etymology, the flowers are hermaphroditic—as are their symbolic functions as Charlie's male imaginings of Susan's sexuality. John (Chris Cooper), the human subject of her book, informs her in the film that each orchid has a matching insect that mates with the flower and pollinates it. This is an alteration from the book, in which such scientific information remains unattributed;[11] in the film, John functions as the lowly life form that pollinates her creatively and sexually. As a writer, Susan molds John to fit her own fantasy, initially considering him fodder for dinner party anecdotes (soon realizing the personal betrayal she enacts in doing so), and later becoming attracted to him. Susan's personal blossoming does not happen in John's presence, however. She feels ill at ease in his funny-smelling van and miserably trudges through the swamp with him. Lying in bed and thinking about him, or talking to him over the phone—at moments when she is, in effect, imagining him—are the times when she finds what she desires. Her breakthrough moment, under the influence of a snorted powder extracted from the ghost orchid, comes as she discovers her own body—brushing her teeth, staring at her feet—and as she attempts to simulate the sound of a dial tone with John, a situation that approximates phone sex, typically a form of mutual masturbation. The drug's effect most closely resembles that of Ecstasy, which allows users to appreciate their own bodies by inducing sonic and sensual fascination but not a desire for intercourse. Susan's confessed desire is not for anything external but to feel passion: she desires *self-pleasure*. But, just as Charlie imagines that her writing process is more poetic than his own, his vision of her autoerotic fantasies come as delicate flower images, not as moments of bodily pumping.

Early in *The Orchid Thief* Orlean writes of Laroche, "His life seemed to be filled with things that were just like the ghost orchid—wonderful to imagine and easy to fall in love with but a little fantastic and fleeting and out of reach."[12] The film makes two significant changes to this passage: first, "his" has been removed so that Susan no longer speaks of John's life but instead employs her own, universalized perspective; secondly, this passage appears in the film as the philosophical climax to the book, its final moral. (A special prop book must have been printed for the film to make the text appear in this order.) Orlean presents a similar account with a more upbeat sentiment near the close of the real book. She writes of not finding the

elusive ghost orchid, "At this point I realized it was just as well that I never saw a ghost orchid, so that it could never disappoint me, and so it would remain forever something I wanted to see."[13] *Adaptation,* like it imagines Susan's personal life, reimagines Orlean's desire to perpetuate desire as a meditation on disappointment—more specifically the disappointment of not experiencing what one imagines. An asocial form of sexual activity, masturbation has been pathologized as producing emotional aftereffects of dissatisfaction, loneliness, and shame. But in *Adaptation* fantasy and disappointment are preferable to the drama of "real life," as portrayed through John's grief in losing his family in a car wreck, his wife in a divorce, and his plant nursery in Hurricane Andrew. Seemingly at a loss for dealing with such devastation, Charlie (and Kaufman and Jonze) rush through these events, which broadside the audience like a truck.

By shying away from sustained attention to Laroche's non-fiction tragedy, Charlie finds himself grappling with the problem of ending a script without action. So he must "create the drama," as per instructions from screenwriting guru Robert Mckee (Brian Cox). Thus Charlie enlists the aid of his fictional twin brother Donald, and both their script and *Adaptation* integrate car chases, a dopey theme song (The Turtles' "Happy Together"), and a sentimental life lesson—precisely the formulaic plot elements Charlie originally resisted. Although the film appears to evolve from a thoughtful study of the writing process into an absurdist action yarn because of these turns, the themes of autoerotic fantasy remain. The message of the film, "You are what you love, not what loves you," points to an asocial, non-reciprocal romance. The focus is on one's own experience of loving, one's own desire that remains independent of interaction with the other person. In Donald's theory, which explains Charlie's behavior, autoerotic fantasy allows one to experience the highs of imagined encounters without the threat of heartbreak or the realization that one's ideal is, in fact, human. This resonates with Orlean's concluding thoughts about disappointment that, strangely, have been left unadapted—possibly because this is the life lesson Charlie must learn for himself.

Even the lyrics of "Happy Together," are not actually about *being* together but about *fantasizing*. The song's first two verses:

Imagine me and you, I do
I *think* about you day and night

Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) finds fascination with her own body.

Orlean phones in her affair with John Laroche.

It's only right
To *think* about the girl you love
And hold her tight
So happy together

If I should call you up, invest a dime
And you say you belong to me
And *ease my mind*
Imagine how the world could be
So very fine
So happy together [emphasis added]

Dreaming comes before flesh in this song, and this may help to explain its significance to the film. Curiously, "Happy Together," used as the theme for the brothers' relationship, is a love song. Rather than an incest ode, however, it functions as an ode to oneself since Donald functions as Charlie's imagined alter-ego.

In the film's resolution, Donald and John's violent deaths seem disingenuous rather than tragic; they jolt the viewer in shock, but they do not appeal to mournful responses. Perhaps rather than a dramatic failure, the deaths' inconsequence reflects that the characters that die are merely fictionalized figures who are no longer needed or desired. Charlie and Susan, the film's central writers and autoerotic visionaries, must at this point return to their lives: he to his screenplay and she, presumably, to *The New Yorker* and her marriage. He has learned to embrace his longings, and she has learned to feel passionately. Although Charlie and Amelia meet again at the end of the film, the happy ending comes not from a romantic reunion and resolution (despite finally confessing their feelings, they do not end up together) but from Charlie's belief that he knows how to finish his screenplay.

The film's third act seems to have disappointed many of the viewers who appreciated the film's metatextuality, and it presents the fully self-contradictory resolution for Charlie's self-loathing project. Yet the shift is not so abrupt as to be located in any specific moment—everything that occurs in the last part of the film has been foreshadowed, and the prior masturbatory fantasies themselves stand out as fleeting moments of Hollywood wish fulfillment. The denouement, which self-consciously sells out and pastiches a Hollywood thriller, brings the film full circle, allowing the film to

"swallow its own tail"—the central metaphor of Donald's screenplay *The 3*.

"Adaptation is a profound process," John tells a defensive Susan. A quotation from *The Orchid Thief,* this stands out as the key line of the film: it connects the film's themes of botanical evolution and human behavior to Charlie's literary ambition. The film *Adaptation* is self-indulgent in its self-abuses and its self-reflexivity, but it uses these indulgences in the quest to resolve deeper existential dilemmas and offer fleeting moments of beauty and insight. The characters search not for others but for themselves. The film presents characters suffering through malaise and self-doubt, who struggle to express themselves and to believe in what they are writing. The primary relationships in the film are not between people but between people and their fantasies, and between writers and their own texts. As suggested by Havelock Ellis a century ago, solitary fantasizing remains central to the artistic process, just as masturbation does to the process of sexual self-discovery and maturation. In *Adaptation,* as in the now dismissed earlier scientific studies of onanism, masturbation functions as a stigmatizing source of self-delusion and as a symptom of neurosis, self-doubt, and identity disorders. But it also produces the psychic cure, the fantasies that inspire and enable creation.

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Notes

1. Havelock Ellis, "Auto-Eroticism: A Study of the Spontaneous Manifestations of the Sexual Impulse," in *Studies of the Psychology of Sex, vol. I* (New York: Random House, 1942), 282.
2. For the sake of distinction, filmic characters are referenced by first name and the extra-diegetically real persons are referenced by last name.
3. Ellis, "Auto-Eroticism," 161-283; Rene Spitz, "Authority and Masturbation: Some Remarks on a Bibliographic Investigation," *Yearbook of Psychoanalysis* 9 (1953): 114-116; E.H. Hare, "Masturbatory Insanity: The History of an Idea," *The Journal of Mental Science,* vol. 108, no. 452 (January 1962): 1-25; Robert H. MacDonald, "The Frightful Consequences of Onanism: Notes on the History of a Delusion," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* vol. 28, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1967): 423-31; R.P. Neuman, "Masturbation, Madness, and the Modern Concept of Childhood and Adolescence," *Journal of Social History,* vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 1-27; Bennett and Rosario, "Introduction," in *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism,* eds. Bennett and Rosario (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-17.
4. Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 21 and 277.
5. Bennett and Rosario, 15.
6. Laqueur, pp. 397-420.
7. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. IX (1906-1908),* trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959).
8. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," in *Solitary Pleasures,* 140-41.
9. Jonze has also famously directed such fantasy videos as the Beastie Boys' "Sabotage," in which the rappers appear as 1970s cop show characters; Björk's "It's Oh So Quiet," in which she breaks in and out of musical numbers; and Fatboy Slim's "Weapon of Choice," which imagines Christopher Walken cutting loose and dancing around a hotel lobby.
10. J. Hoberman, "The Truths About Charlie," *The Village Voice,* 4 December 2002, http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0249/hoberman.php.
11. Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 47.
12. Ibid., 41.
13. Ibid., 281.

Abstract This review of *Adaptation* (2002) argues that the film productively narrativizes masturbation's myriad associations, pathologies, and, most importantly, possibilities for creative inspiration. The self-reflexive film presents writers as autoerotic fantasizers who suffer through malaise and self-doubt, and struggle to express themselves and to believe in what they are writing.

Monster's Ball

Director: Marc Forster. Producers: Lee Daniels, Milo Addica, Eric Kopeloff, Will Rokos. Writers: Addica and Rokos. Cinematography: Roberto Schaefer. Music: Asche and Spencer. Lee Daniels Entertainment.

Leticia Musgrove (Halle Berry) and Hank Grotowski (Billy Bob Thornton) in *Monster's Ball*

Despite the growing number of African Americans appearing on network and cable television, in sitcoms, romance programs, and music videos, dramatic roles—particularly for black women in mainstream films—remain scarce.[1] Consequently, current discourse on black representation in (and access to) cinema has either been static or limited to the rash of black romantic comedies and slapstick titles (for example, *Booty Call* [1997], *The Wood* [1999], *The Best Man* [1999], *Love and Basketball* [2000], *Brown Sugar* [2002], *Barbershop* [2002], *Deliver Us From Eva* [2003], and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* [2004]). We devour the sight and sound of the beautiful Beyoncé Knowles at Super Bowl and NBA All-Star halftime shows, but as the response to her MTV movie, *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* (2001) reveals, we expect more from our movies than our music videos: engaging stories, subtler acting, some substance. The paucity of quality dramatic roles for black actresses exposes Hollywood's continual unwillingness to invest in films depicting black women as more than sexual objects and romantic partners. The critical attention, artistic praise, and public controversy surrounding Marc Forster's *Monster's Ball* (2001) and Halle Berry's Oscar for her performance in that film demonstrate the existence of an audience (and therefore a market) for independent, arthouse cinema featuring dramatic African-American characters in serious roles.

After Halle Berry's appearance in *Monster's Ball,* and her resulting Oscar, her celebrity status soared. The Oscar ensures her place in the Hollywood pantheon, and film historians will recollect Berry as one in a long line of African-American entertainment industry "firsts." The William Foster Photoplay Company of Chicago was the first black movie-production house (circa 1911). Oscar Micheaux's *Birthright* (1918) was the first black-directed, feature-length African American film. Hattie McDaniel was the first black American to receive an Oscar for her supporting role in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Sidney Poitier became the first black actor to receive an Academy Award for his performance in *Lilies of the Field* (1963). Now, 40 years later, Halle Berry is the first African-American woman to win Best Actress. And, as I will discuss later, it is not insignificant that Berry won an Oscar after establishing a link between herself and Dorothy Dandridge (by playing the actress in the HBO biopic *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*), the first black woman ever nominated for an Academy Award.

What is disturbing—albeit not surprising—is that the roles for which black actors have won Oscars have something in common: all depict isolated African-American characters as beholden to the beneficence of white philanthropy, or, at least, humbled by the moral rectitude of white paternalism. In all three cases, white paternalism exists alongside black isolationism. Hattie McDaniel's brazen, boisterous and big bosomed Mammy faithfully served the O'Hara family, and appeared "proud of the mutual affection between master and servant."[2] Her various mammy roles (featured in films like *Judge Priest* [1934], *Showboat* [1936], *Saratoga* [1937], and *Since You Went Away* [1943]) changed over time as she exerted more control over the "Big House," but her image did little to push the boundaries of roles available to black women. Poitier's Homer Smith was an itinerant handyman, who met five impoverished nuns, fixed their leaky farmhouse roof, and then single-handedly built them a chapel while raising the necessary funds. For part of his career, Poitier signified an anachronistic image of black masculinity, one at the service of white characters: a man de-politicized and/or detached from the Civil Rights struggle, as in *Paris Blues* (1961). Berry's Leticia Musgrove in *Monster's Ball* is a sexy single mom who loses her Death Row inmate husband, Lawrence (Sean P. Combs), to the state and her overweight pre-teen son, Tyrell (Coronji Calhoun) to a hit-and-run driver. No

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sooner do these tragedies befall her then she is comforted, and sexually subdued, by the similarly bereaved prison guard, Hank Grotowski (Billy Bob Thornton).

Halle Berry's star persona has coalesced in variety of sultry, love-interest roles. As Natalie in *Strictly Business* (1991) she played Joseph Phillips' doe-eyed sweetheart. In *Boomerang* (1992), portraying Angela, she tamed Eddie Murphy's womanizing Marcus Graham. In comic book, action, and fantasy films like *The Flintstones* (1994), *X-Men* (2000), or *Die Another Day* (2002) she captivated audiences by playing eye-catching, cartoonish gal pals or by displaying the pulchritude and physical prowess of a Bond-girl. As the ill-kempt dope fiend Vivian in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991), she acted as the smooth-skinned girlfriend of Samuel L. Jackson's destructive junkie, Gator. Playing Josie Potenza in *The Rich Man's Wife* (1996), Berry was the beautiful young wife of a much older white man. It was not until she portrayed recovering crack addict Khaila Richards in *Losing Isaiah* (1995) that Berry briefly broke the ingénue typecast to render a more substantive, dramatic character.

Two films preceding *Monster's Ball,* however, returned the actress to the "girlfriend" character niche with only slight changes. In *Bulworth* (1998), as Nina, she played the eponymous senator's political and sexual muse. In *Swordfish* (2001), as Ginger Knowles, she flashed her boobs to embody an amoral undercover agent. These two films share one element with *Monster's Ball*: each positions Berry as the sexual object—not of black men, but of rebellious *white* men who resist the norms and mores of "The System," transgressing social boundaries including the proverbial "color line." Warren Beatty's rogue Senator Bulworth rejects the conservative political machinery of Washington to embrace Clinton's New Democrat platform and woo Nina. John Travolta's high-tech thief Gabriel steals the government's stolen drug money and absconds with Ginger. And Billy Bob Thornton's brooding prison guard, Hank, rejects the criminal justice system and the discursive regimes of white Southern masculinity.

In films like *Monster's Ball*, Berry's "blackness" is a "floating signifier," a signifier that performs two different but related semiotic functions.[3] First, it operates ideologically as a concomitant signifier of white male insurgence against miscegenation taboos. For the characters within the film her blackness is a sign of Hank's insurgence against the social codes of racial segregation. Hank's racist father, Buck, says as much when he refers to dating Leticia as "tasting nigger juice." Buck's epithet both humiliates Leticia and denigrates interracial sex. Because his metaphor for interracial sex evokes appetite, and her visit to their home comes as a surprise, this scene establishes an intertextual link between *Monster's Ball* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), the well-known cinematic tale that neatly resolves familial tensions with interracial sex. The mythic fairytale of acceptance wouldn't be necessary if the reality of interracial relations weren't so threatening to the status quo. Interracial heterosexuality—and its link to reproduction—threatens the hegemony of whiteness because it breaks the biological assumptions implicit in definitions of race. This is precisely why white supremacist discourse is particularly obsessed with black/white interracial sexuality. While interracial sexuality has historically often been condemned, American anti-miscegenation sentiment focused exclusively on preventing and punishing sexual relations between black men and white women.[4] The fact that white (Southern) men have historically had license to pursue coercive sexual liaisons with black women—particularly under slavery—makes the fact of Leticia's blackness even more politically charged.

The second semiotic function of Halle Berry's blackness (or non-whiteness) is as a marker of racial difference that reinforces whiteness as a category. In his study of whiteness as a social formation, Richard Dyer views the term "black" as a central concept in the construction of the white racial imaginary. Historically, "blackness"—and its corresponding corporeal identity—has been associated in Western culture with darkness, deviance, impurity, the underworld, and the unknowable "Other." Thus, it is solely by contrast that whiteness connotes light, purity, Judeo-Christian piety, and normalcy. That "whiteness" *only* exists in relation to "blackness" is an observation W.E.B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Michelle Wallace, and Toni Morrison, among others, have made in their work on the centrality of black representation to the construction of white identity.

Thus, in *Bulworth, Swordfish,* and *Monster's Ball,* Berry's otherness is not simply coupled with white rebellion—it also legitimizes white male authority. For instance, in the concluding romantic climax of *Bulworth,* Nina declares her love for Senator Bulworth saying: "you my *nigga*." The linguistic shift from "nigger" to "nigga" may mark a re-definition and re-signification of the epithet, but when spoken by a black person in this context it functions as an authenticating endorsement of the white Bulworth. In *Swordfish,* Ginger betrays her boyfriend only to be hanged in a manner that evokes a lynching. The lynching is later

revealed as a hoax, but the harrowing imagery resonates nonetheless. Many black viewers remember *Swordfish* as "the one where Halle Berry gets lynched." Finally, in *Monster's Ball,* as already mentioned, Leticia is dismissed as Hank's "nigger juice." So it is significant that this racial epithet (in its multiple variations) is used to semiotically inscribe Berry as black within these films. The "N" word has become the best known of the American language's many racial insults, evolving into the paradigmatic slur. It is the epithet that generates epithets, suggested by the denigration of Arabs as "sand niggers," Irish as the "niggers of Europe," and Palestinians as the "niggers of the Middle East."[5]

How ironic that Berry's characters demarcate racial difference when the extra-diegetic audience (of spectators in the theater) is cognizant of Berry's *biraciality* (i.e., her liminal position between the socially constructed identity categories of black and white). But if Berry's characters often render the social construction of whiteness and white privilege visible, what do they convey about African-American womanhood as a social construction, and the representation of black female sexuality? The character of Leticia is arguably a reproduction of the myth of excessive black sexuality, another caricature of black women as wanton. It is with this in mind that we can begin to consider why black and white audiences read the film so differently.

In *Monster's Ball,* Berry's Leticia Musgrove can be read in various ways through the identity-category matrix of race, gender, class, and national regionalism. Against the backdrop of enduring racial stereotypes in American popular culture, Leticia Musgrove seems a conflation of the sexual siren and the welfare queen. An alternative interpretation of the film—one extricated from the historical legacy of racial caricatures—might construe Leticia as a realistically written character, a lonely, black, single mother beset by multiple tragedies. A third, equally generous, reading might debunk the dichotomy between "stereotype" and "realism" as always already failing to capture the complexity of any character's construction, particularly because such analyses focus completely on racial dynamics, thereby excluding the gender and class components of contemporary (Southern) society depicted in *Monster's Ball*. The ensuing analysis is an examination of *Monster's Ball* and the competing but entangled discourses of womanhood, masculinity, miscegenation, and the prison industrial complex as they are embedded within the film. By deftly manipulating these discourses, the narrative of the film utilizes black womanhood to redeem white Southern masculinity of its historical responsibility for racial injustice.

Monster's Ball

When *Monster's Ball* begins, we are introduced to the restless Hank Grotowski. A middle-aged widower, he suffers from chronic insomnia: a conditioned response to his duties as an emotionless supervisor of Death Row detail in a Georgia penitentiary. Unable to sleep but emotionally numb, Hank indulges in his nightly ritual: he settles his upset stomach by driving to the local 24-hour diner, where, greeted by his regular waitress, Lucille (Taylor Simpson), he orders his usual meal, chocolate ice cream and black coffee. Making polite conversation, Lucille asks about Sonny, for whom Hank shows more apathy than concern. The tragedy of their father/son relationship is that despite mutually felt alienation and melancholy, neither can bridge the gulf between them.

The discrepancy between Hank's perception that Sonny is "okay" and the actual pathos of Sonny's life is demonstrated in the next scene during which Sonny meets the town prostitute, Vera (Amber Rules), in a cheap motel. Waiting for her to arrive, he examines his face in the motel's magnifying mirror. His distorted countenance fills the screen as he pauses in forlorn self-reflection. Immediately following their sexual transaction, Sonny's despondent expression returns. He sinks back into his chair provoking Vera to ask: "What's wrong, hun'? You look so sad." A few of the character's names are inversely related to their dispositions or effect on others. Chief among them is "Sonny," whose very name connotes the warmth of a familial relation to which others would be drawn. But he is neither warm nor well liked by women (or by Hank, the man to whom he is actually "sonny"). His sadness is thus one of the many ironies of *Monster's Ball*. His moment of mirrored self-examination establishes reflection, introspection, and symbolic irony as motifs in the film. It is not simply that characters (mis)recognize themselves in the mirror; they are struggling with depression because they are exactly who they *don't* want to be. In this reflection of a fragmented self, the very notion of a unified, unambiguously gendered subject (in this case, a white, heterosexual male) is rendered dubious. Both father and son are brooding, contemplative men for whom the daily performance of masculinity has itself become burdensome.

Sonny's inability to express emotion reveals itself as a patrilineal family trait—a trait linked to their personal brand of masculinity and their professional (multi-generational) commitment to the vocation of correction officer. Hank's stoic conduct as an unfeeling executioner mirrors his fatherly demeanor as an

Leticia's shocked encounter with Hank's father (Peter Boyle).

indifferent parent. As Sonny's boss *and* father, Hank has made the judicial machinations of the state indistinguishable from Grotowski family tradition (as evidenced by the scrapbook Sonny's grandfather keeps). From Sonny, Hank expects flawless performance as an executioner, a sign of Grotowski manhood; and from his friendships, Hank demands racial segregation, since loyalty to family depends upon enforcing the color line. Literally and figuratively, personally and professionally, Sonny—like Hank before him—is gradually being conditioned to the patriarchal Law of the white Southern Father.

Within psychoanalytic discourse, masculinity is irrevocably tied to sexuality. Because the father is an obstacle in the boy's Oedipal desire for the mother, a boy's first emotional experience—following his experience of desire—is fear of the bigger, stronger, more sexually potent father. According to the cultural logic of this model, Sonny's sexuality would resemble his father's. In *Monster's Ball,* Sonny's sexuality does in fact resemble Hank's. In different scenes, both men have sex with the same prostitute, in the same position, in what appears to be the same motel room. But despite his Oedipal trajectory, Sonny resists identification with his oppressive father. The distorted image of masculine selfhood that Sonny sees in the mirror is, perhaps, cinematically coded in the film script as patrilineal. For instance, the family name "Grotowski" is doubly endowed with meaning. First, the character name Grotowski—in its homonymic resonance with grotesqueries—indirectly but semiotically suggests that a distorted sense of masculinity is a familial characteristic. Second, the name evokes the legacy of theater director Jerzy Grotowski (a master of modern theater along with Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Artaud, and Brecht) who, in addition to establishing the Polish Laboratory Theater, cultivated a "poor theater," which eliminated all nonessentials like costumes, sound effects, makeup, sets, lighting, and strictly defined staging area in an effort to redefine the relation between actors and audience and underscore "self discovery."

The ultimate indictment of Sonny's splintered manhood comes from Hank, who declares that Sonny is "weak" like his mother (who committed suicide years earlier). This association with the mother emasculates Sonny because it links him to her maternal hysteria. Hank's accusation unmasks Sonny as a fraud, indicting him for being a man who has not completely

separated from the things mothers represent: humiliation, infancy, helplessness, and dependency.[6] This indictment triggers an emotional reaction from the character, and cultural associations for the spectator. In traditional Freudian thought, the mother, the womb, and hysteria are inextricably linked. Freud's teacher, the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1824-1893), claimed hysteria was a hereditary disposition. In *Monster's Ball,* mother and son ultimately reject the repressive Grotowski family tradition, a rejection that is psychological and physiological. In throwing up before an execution, Sonny involuntarily rejects the authoritarian masculine code of withholding emotion, a code of behavior often endemic to prison culture.

If the penitentiary in the United States was from the onset a system of class control, it was also from the beginning a system of racial control.[7] The Grotowski family's history of working as correction officers in Georgia is an important signifier of race and class stratification in *Monster's Ball*. This history is the backdrop informing Buck and Hank's racism as well as Sonny's rejection of his father's bigotry. The Southern postbellum penal system (from which the present day prison industrial complex derives) cannot be understood without reference to the end of slavery and the transition to free labor. Economic modernization in the New South relied upon penal slavery. In the transitional period from Reconstruction through the 1930s, hybrid forms of capitalist relations (made up of relics of slavery) grafted onto developing labor relations. The penal system of convict leasing in the New South was not just a corrupt system of labor recruitment, control, and exploitation; it was also suited to the political economy of a post-emancipation society. "From a purely penological point of view," writes Alex Lichtenstein, "the convict lease was a fiscally conservative means of coping with a new burden: ex-slaves were emancipated from the dominion of the slaveholder only to be subject to the authority of the state."[8] Lichtenstein's argument echoes Angela Davis's work on the prison industrial complex,[9] and Davis's work echoes W.E.B. DuBois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935) in which he asserted that

> in no part of the modern world has there been so open and conscious a traffic in crime for deliberate social degradation and private profit as in the South since slavery. . . . Since 1876 [the end of Reconstruction], Negroes have been arrested on the slightest provocation and given long sentences for fines which they were compelled to work out.[10]

The current rates of racial disproportionality in U.S. imprisonment—and the critical role of the prison industrial complex in sustaining the new global economy[11]—can only be understood against the backdrop of the full historical trajectory of racial domination in the United States.

The impact of massive downsizing in the United States on urban African-American and Latino communities was catastrophic in northern cities. Redlining and racist violence kept African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos out of the 1950s suburbanization drive that allowed many working-class white families to move out of the inner cities, restricting the former to urban ghettos where they were warehoused with few opportunities for mobility. As job cuts hit these communities, they were devastated by pandemic rates of unemployment, a declining tax base, and resultant cuts in social welfare, education, and medical provision. The result: spiraling rates of poverty, drug addiction, violence, and social dislocation. The scene had therefore been set for the mass criminalization of African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos.[12]

One political corollary of the convict labor system in the South (and the new criminal justice system in relation to capital) was the preservation of white supremacist ideology.[13] Whether Swiss film director Marc Forster intended it or not, it is incumbent upon progressive spectators to place the racism and sexism displayed by Hank and Buck (Peter Boyle) into this larger socio-economic historical context. The political economy of the South has historically conditioned white men to traffic black bodies through a penal system, thereby creating jobs and stimulating a flailing economy. Signs of this depressed economy are everywhere visualized in the film, including the presence of one homeless demonstrator holding a sign that reads: "It Must Be Somebody's Fault." And signs of the racially disproportionate rate of the death sentence are in evidence as well. During a dry run for the execution, a black police officer is obliged to stand in for the prisoner, a morosely ironic plot point that doesn't strike any of the characters as telling, but is a pivotal point in the film.[14]

The Southern political economy, its patriarchal laws, and its concomitant code of racial ethics are evident in the relationship Hank and Sonny establish with inmate Lawrence Musgrove (Sean Puffy Combs), the Death Row prisoner to whom Leticia is married. Ultimately, the dissimilar ways Hank and Sonny react to Lawrence's sentence reflect the extent to which each man has become inured to the racial and economic order as well as the brutality of capital punishment.

Whereas Hank maintains his equanimity, Sonny loses his composure. Oddly enough, Hank is not the only character to withhold emotion with respect to Lawrence's impending sentence. Leticia also appears to negate the finality of the circumstances.

Spectators first meet Leticia (and her son Tyrell) en route to visit Lawrence hours before his electrocution. For Leticia, visiting the State Penitentiary has become another burden, one indistinguishable from her financial and provisional needs. A leaking car radiator, an unaffordable mortgage, and her depressed son reflect Lawrence's inability to be provider, partner, or father. Leticia's despair results from the financial and personal ramifications of her broken relationship with Lawrence. For some black spectators—particularly hip-hop generationers in their twenties and early thirties—Leticia's movement from Lawrence to Hank (chiefly her explicit sexual relations with the older, white man) is deeply problematic primarily because the film too easily forgives his racism but secondarily because *Monster's Ball* exploits (without contextualizing) the growing gender divide between black men and women.

This gender divide is perhaps best understood through author Bakari Kitwana's discussion of the gender divide in hip-hop culture. The split is attributable to the increased sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy of rap lyrics; the way some male hip-hop devotees have adopted anti-Black woman attitudes espoused on countless rap songs; the unrealistic material expectations of black women; higher rates of black incarceration and socioeconomic antagonisms which lead to higher rates of divorce for blacks than whites.[15] This is not to mention that black women have watched successful black men (e.g., athletes, movie stars, entertainers) choose white women as sexual partners, lovers, or trophy wives for decades.[16] Though set in the rural South and removed from urban hip-hop culture, *Monster's Ball* invokes the social dynamic Kitwana identifies through the extra-cinematic celebrity personae of rap artist and clothing mogul Sean P. Combs (not to mention Mos Def). Combs and Def bring the extra-filmic reality of their hip-hop stardom to the screen in the same way that Berry brings her extra-textual status as a former beauty queen. Neither fact has any direct bearing on *Monster*'s story but both impact spectators' decision to see the film. The movie frames the breakdown in Leticia and Lawrence's relationship as a gender divide ("I'm sorry for every time I hurt you," he tells Leticia); it's the precondition for Leticia's receptiveness to Hank's advances.

During the family's last visit, Lawrence renounces his criminal legacy and his relationship with Tyrell, telling him: "Remember, you ain't me. You're everything that's good about me. You're the best of who I am." Lawrence's compassionate disavowal of paternal influence inversely reflects Hank's brutal negation of Sonny later in the film, when the Grotowski men brawl over Sonny's breakdown at Lawrence's execution. Whereas Lawrence wants Tyrell to escape his legacy of criminality, Hank demands Sonny conform to an inheritance of disciplinarity.

Guarding Lawrence before the sentence, Sonny sits calmly as the inmate sketches his portrait. During the quietude of this brief exchange, the surveilling gaze is momentarily reversed: Lawrence observes Sonny, capturing his countenance on paper with the steady dexterity of a forensic detective. They view each other not as inmate and guard, guilty vs. innocent, black or white, but as individuals. This scene encompasses the neo-liberal, non-conformist optimism of *Monster's Ball*. It prefigures the film's naïve ethos of "color-blind" interracial relationships that miraculously transcend history with almost no onscreen discussion or negotiation of race relations. It also prefigures the relationship between Hank and Leticia that will become the center of the film. What makes the exchange between Sonny and Lawrence more credible than the relationship between Hank and Leticia is that the two men are of the same generation—a post-Civil Rights demographic less emotionally encumbered by the legacy of segregation.

The fleeting exchange between Sonny and Lawrence contributes to Sonny's malaise, preventing him from stoically performing his duties at Lawrence's execution. The film's narrative implies that Sonny's compassion for Lawrence is related to his general attitude toward blacks. Unlike his father, Sonny is not overtly racist. After all, Sonny's only friends, Willie and Darryl (actors Charles Cowan and Taylor LaGrange), are the two young sons of a black neighbor. But the kids are frightened off Grotowski land shotgun-style when Hank executes Buck's orders to get those "porch monkeys" off his property. This crucial scene establishes the way borders and boundaries are an essential part of maintaining the fixity of identity—in this case white masculinity. As Abby Ferber notes, "the re-establishment of racial boundaries" (here the boundaries of the Grotowski homestead), "and the reassertion of a white identity also require the reestablishment of gender boundaries and the reassertion of traditional gender identities."[17] Here, the assertion of white manhood is positioned in opposition to black boyhood, as male identity is made the central project of white supremacist behavior. Mixing with these racial "others"

calls Sonny's allegiance to white masculinity into question much as does his involuntary reaction to Lawrence's execution.

Walking Lawrence to the electric chair, Sonny buckles and vomits, disrupting Lawrence's last walk, and embarrassing his supervisor/father. This loss of self-control is another moment when Sonny fails to maintain physical and personal boundaries. If masculinity depends upon remaining calm and reliable in a crisis, then proving you're a man means never revealing involuntary emotions. The inability to maintain a façade and safeguard these boundaries is taken as weakness. Hank knows Sonny is under the scrutiny of other men. In society at large, but in prison culture specifically, a particular brand of masculinity must be performed. In his research on masculinity, Michael Kimmel has argued that "manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" and that "masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment." He writes: "We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood."[18] Reading the narrative of *Monster's Ball* in light of the literature on the social construction of masculinity enables viewers to access both the text and subtext of the film. Embedded in the subtext of the story is a somber meditation on the relationship between whiteness and heterosexual masculinity.

Given this context, Sonny's loss of control reflects negatively on Hank. Sonny's sickness creates an unbridgeable rift between father and son: it provokes a fistfight and ultimately fuels Sonny's retaliatory suicide. His suicide has multiple meanings: first, it once again links Sonny to feminine hysteria; second, it evinces the depth of his alienation; third, it indicts Hank's neglectful parenting as unrequited parent/child love; and finally, it serves as a full-force rejection of Hank's unjust penal system and its accompanying values.

If *Monster's Ball* parallels the two failed father-and-son relationships (Lawrence and Tyrell with Hank and Sonny), then it also parallels the sudden death of two sons. Late one rainy night, a car hits Tyrell as he walks home with Leticia. When the coroner pronounces the boy dead, Leticia is inconsolable. In the absence of any family, friends or companions, she is comforted by Hank, who drove by minutes after the accident and took them to the hospital. Having recently lost Sonny, Hank provides the emotional support Leticia needs.

On another evening, he drives her home from waitressing. Before dropping her off, Hank explains why he helped her the night Tyrell died. Touched by his honesty and identifying with his admission that he never was a very good parent, Leticia invites Hank inside. They drink Jack Daniels as she slowly unleashes her grief. Mourning while intoxicated, she talks about Lawrence, Tyrell, and motherhood. Lamenting Tyrell's obesity, she says: "He was a good kid . . . but he was so *fat*! I didn't want my baby to be like that. As a black man in American you can't be like that." Here, Leticia expresses anxiety over the socially constructed stigmas attached to race and obesity. In American culture, it is unacceptable to be overweight since obesity is considered a deviation from the norm. It is even more unacceptable to be heavy *and* black in a society that constructs blackness and fatness as ugly, unfeminine, offensive, and abject.

In her research on obesity and race, Margaret Bass claims: "The nation and the medical profession have determined that what many black folks and poor folks and southerners eat is unhealthy food, food that no one should eat."[19] While Leticia is not fat, spectators understand that her household relies on the kind of unhealthy diet of which Bass speaks. Leticia inadvertently admits as much when she tells Hank that Tyrell would ". . . eat up all the *Popeye's* chicken before I could get a chance to eat." Tyrell's obesity is a result of his childhood depression, Leticia's incessant verbal abuse, and a consequence of their socioeconomic status. Similarly, Leticia's alcoholism is a manifestation of her depression. Her child, however, is not only an extension of her body; he is a reflection of her educational background and mothering skills. Just as Sonny's work performance was a reflection on Hank, so Tyrell's fatness was a reflection on Leticia. Hank's non-judgmental response to Tyrell's obesity (and Leticia's drinking) is tantamount to an acceptance of her failings and foibles as well as a reminder of his own neglectful parenting.

A pre-coitus confession turns into a gritty sexual come-on as an intoxicated Leticia repeatedly groans, "I want you to make me feel good." Images of their frenetic, desperate lovemaking are intercut with images of Leticia's hands reaching to free a caged-bird. This use of parallel editing creates a visual metaphor for release from sexual confinement. That Hank is the man who unleashes Leticia proves doubly ironic given his former status as a prison guard on "The Row," and, secondly, given his own emotional caginess. The film's avian metaphor for freedom resonates with other characters in the film struggling to escape the personal prisons in which they find themselves. For instance, Sonny lived in the prison of his father's house, and the patriarchal legacy of white supremacy maintained by his

grandfather. Lawrence lived in the literal prison house of a racist state. Until meeting Leticia, Hank lived inside the shell of his emotional alienation, and Leticia escapes economic entrapment through Hank's good will.

Throughout the mise-en-scène of *Monster's Ball* there is ironic play with visual metaphors for freedom and captivity. At one point, the director brings these contrasting images into a dialectical relationship. After visiting Lawrence at the penitentiary, Leticia and Tyrell go home and watch television. They sit quietly watching as a young white woman (with valley-girl cadence) enthusiastically describes sky-surfing:

> Sky-surfing . . . is when you skydive with a board attached to your feet . . . and try to do different maneuvers. A camera flyer flies with a camera on top of their helmet filming the sky surfer . . . and flies interactively with the sky-surfer capturing the moves. My camera flyer is my husband: Craig O'Brien. Freefall is usually around 50 seconds. The altitude that we jump from is 12,500 feet.

Following the grainy image of a happy white couple kissing, the film cuts to an image of Lawrence sitting in his cell. *Monster's Ball* suggests something specific in the juxtaposition of the happily married, white sky-surfers and the lonely black prison inmate, separated from his family. Whereas Lawrence is captive, motionless and caged, they are flying freely, sailing against the wind current: this disparity marks the privileges of the leisure class and the extravagant recreational activities that fill their spare time. As the film continues to crosscut between Lawrence being handcuffed and the sky-surfers diving, spectators can hear the sound of wind blowing on the television.

The closest we see Leticia come to the freeing sensations presented by the sky-surfers is the liberation she feels in her sexual relationship with Hank. As cathartic as the narrative renders it, their sexual relationship still stands out as a contrived plot point and one of the most implausible aspects of *Monster's Ball*. The notion that a black woman living in the Deep South would have no extended family, community, or network upon which to rely for support is implausible. Even more improbable is the notion that in the absence of such a network she would find solace in the arms of an older white man whose paternal guilt has expediently overturned his racist conditioning. Many black spectators were appalled by this portrayal of black sexuality.

If Leticia is a problematic cinematic character it is not only because of her facile intimacy with the bigoted Hank. Rather, it is because the narrative of *Monster's Ball* places Leticia (and her son Tyrell) in a socioeconomic vacuum. They exist outside the context of any black institutions: churches, schools, civic groups, or extended family network. This storyline provides no framework for the financial conditions of black underclass life and/or the racial division of labor. It consequently fails to explicate the economic structure of racism and the relationship between slavery and mass incarceration. In the absence of such an explanation it inadvertently reinforces the stereotype of pathological blackness. Even a conservative sociologist like William Julius Wilson would argue, "when figures of black crime, teenage pregnancy, female-headed families and welfare dependency are released to the public without sufficient explanation, racial stereotypes are reinforced."[20] And, as Wahneema Lubiano suggests, such images surface as manifestations of narrative ideological battle. They present, she writes, "a particular nuanced 'blackness' constructed and strengthened by narratives preexisting in the national historical memory around the 'black lady' and the 'welfare mother.'"[21]

That the film relies on these racial stereotypes is ironic because—to its credit—*Monster's Ball* reveals the relationship between race, gender, and class. The over-determining economic forces bringing Hank and Leticia into a relationship reveal the narrative link between this triumvirate of identity categories. Even the sex scenes between Hank and Leticia cannot be extricated from the historic and economic conditions which make the relationship possible in the first place. For instance, the narrative literally and figuratively links financial security with sexual activity. After moving in to live with Hank, the couple decides to share the same bedroom. During foreplay, Hank tells Leticia, "I wanna take care of you." "Good," she replies, ". . . because I really need to be taken care of." This conversation occurs immediately before Hank performs oral sex on Leticia. The double entendre couldn't be clearer. He is taking care of *all* of her needs.

In *Monster's Ball* Leticia is not only sexually reckless, she is also economically dependent. Hank's desire for Leticia manifests as economic paternalism. He gives her Sonny's car, moves her when she's evicted, invites her to live with him, and names his newly purchased gas station after her. Because she's in no financial position to refuse Hank's generosity, her (sexual) desire to reciprocate his caretaking is inextricably linked to her monetary needs. Leticia has no

Hand feeds Leticia ice cream in a tellingly paternalistic moment.

choice but to accept the comfort of her chocolate-ice-cream-eating sugar daddy, the consumption of which may be read as symbolic of his interest in Leticia. She responds in kind, selling her wedding ring to purchase a white Stetson for her chivalrous cowboy. *Monster's Ball* makes an insidious ideological maneuver by allowing its protagonist to atone for his racism (and parental neglect) through the charitable assistance he gives to his black girlfriend. The film neatly absolves Hank of his racism, thereby allowing the white theater audience to feel resolution with the dénouement. But it's a resolution that's more difficult—perhaps impossible—for African-American audiences.[22]

As the response to the film demonstrates, there are multiple and competing readings of *Monster's Ball*. Many of these readings are valid given the film's narrative. While I read the text as grappling with gender, race, and class, I also view it as ultimately redeeming Southern white masculinity through the symbolic reparations Hank makes in Leticia's name (e.g., the gas station). This superficial redemption (which makes sexual partnership its reward) is what angered so many African-American viewers. The tumultuous events preceding and following the Academy Awards made the polemics of the film evident.

Oscar Night

Few dispute that the 2002 Academy Award ceremony was a momentous event. Excitement began with the trio of nominations: Will Smith was nominated for his role in *Ali*, Denzel Washington for portraying a crooked cop in *Training Day,* and Berry for Leticia in *Monster's Ball*. The event was historic because it interrupted a 30-year lull. The last time three black actors were nominated for lead roles in the same year was 1972: Paul Winfield and Cicely Tyson for *Sounder* and Diana Ross for *Lady Sings the Blues*. None of them won. That Halle Berry would be the first woman to win in this category guarantees her future film projects. Ever-vigilant skeptics like Spike Lee—who despite disdain still seems obsessed with the Oscars—countered the optimism of the ceremony. He questioned whether these events signified any sustainable institutional change when he quipped: "I'm sure many people were thinking the same way the moment

after Sidney Poitier won his Oscar for *Lilies of the Field*."[23]

In the months following the Oscars, controversy ensued. Caustic remarks issued by Angela Bassett in *Newsweek* (in which she criticized the explicitly sexual aspect of Berry's Oscar-winning role in *Monster's Ball* and subtly questioned Berry's choice to accept the role) re-ignited a fierce debate inside and outside the African-American entertainment community about Berry and the bittersweet significance of her victory. Reporting on the debate, Alison Samuels of *Newsweek* wrote:

> Bassett is clear she isn't criticizing Berry—just the way Hollywood views women in general and black women in particular. Several actresses, including Vanessa Williams, passed on *Monster's Ball* as well. "Film is forever, says Bassett. "It's about putting something out there you can be proud of ten years later. I mean, Meryl Streep won Oscars without all that. . . . Bassett is the first to admit that her career hasn't gone the way she'd dreamed it would when the spotlight swung her way after *What's Love Got to Do With It*. "I remember sitting at the Oscars and thinking, This is great! This is the beginning of something big for me . . . but I didn't work again for another year and a half. I guess I was pretty naïve to think it would be different—that it was just about the talent—particularly for someone who looks like me."[24]

After grabbing Hollywood's attention with strong performances, Bassett was denied the quality roles befitting a classically trained actress. Instead, she was offered "booty call" scripts. Her sentiments reiterate those of other entertainment industry professionals who are aware of the dismal figures on black under-representation in Hollywood.[25] Before Bassett's criticisms gained momentum, *Monster's Ball* producer Lee Daniels and Lion's Gate president Tom Ortenberg issued a statement that Bassett was never offered the lead role.[26]

The veracity of Bassett's comments matters less than what the debate itself suggests of black women's representation in mainstream features. The Bassett-Berry dispute surrounding *Monster's Ball* highlights the fact that there is still a paucity of quality roles available to lighter-skinned black and Latina women (such as Halle Berry, Thandie Newton, Jada Pinkett, Beyoncé Knowles, and Rosario Dawson) and even fewer parts for browner-skinned black women (Angela Bassett, Debbie Morgan, or Lela Rochon). Perhaps this scarcity informed Bassett's remark that she was "naïve to think it would be different . . . for someone who looks like me." As a biracial woman, Berry occupies an interstitial, albeit relatively privileged, position on the American racial hierarchy. Her complexion is an enabler, making the onscreen fleshiness of her characters acceptable to both white and black spectators. Rarely, if ever, do audiences see dark-skinned black women depicted erotically in cinema.

Historically, white women have occupied the most optically privileged position as objects of the gaze. But this privilege has been limited to objectification. This is an irony historians, sociologists, and film scholars like Richard Dyer, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and Karen Brodkin have articulated in their work on whiteness as a social phenomenon. There are particular anxieties surrounding the whiteness of white women vis-à-vis reproduction and child rearing. "The problem of whiteness and sexuality," writes Dyer "is represented differently for men and women because in the West, heterosexuality implies gendered sexualities."[27] Extending Dyer's thesis, I would add that in Western (and specifically American) popular culture, white and light-skinned women are more readily constructed as desirable. Nowhere are these color hierarchies more evident than in Hollywood cinema, where the socially constructed national ideals of beauty and desirability are upheld. Thus, despite classical theatrical training and a history of strong performances, Bassett is not as highly valued by the white, capitalist, heterosexual patriarchy of Hollywood or by the African-American, heterosexual moviegoing public—both of which grant higher value to light-skinned, fair-haired women as objects of the gaze. A biracial beauty like Berry makes evident that whiteness is a relational category.[28]

One way to comprehend Berry's position in the forefront of the Hollywood limelight is in the historical context of Dorothy Dandridge's celebrity. Ever since Berry's appearance in the 1999 HBO biography picture *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*, as the eponymous star, she solidified a tenuous connection between herself and Dandridge. Halle Berry has been marketed as the heir to Dandridge's celebrity legacy. For example, in the popular black press she was presented as a kindred spirit or reincarnation of the fifties starlet (as in *Ebony,* March 1999: "Halle Berry: On How She Found Dorothy Dandridge's Spirit and Healed Her Own").

Ebony, Jet, and *Sepia* were among publications that idealized Dandridge's "coffee-colored" complexion, reifying it as the quintessence of her incomparable beauty. Like the social construction of Halle Berry today, Dandridge occupied a privileged position that enabled the entertainment industry to manufacture her as beautiful, erotic, and desirable. As a performer, Dandridge also worked diligently to project an image of beauty and desirability. As a consequence, her erotic charisma was *simultaneously* something she brought out of herself and something the culture industry projected upon her.

After all, it was Dandridge who (like her peers Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt, Abbey Lincoln, and Diahann Carroll) steadfastly paved the way by breaking Hollywood's color line. Symbolizing the trope of the "tragic mulatto," in her films Dandridge was a harbinger of the cultural obsession with mixed-race women. Conceptually, and in terms of narrative trajectory, the "biracial beauty" differs from the trope of the "tragic mulatto." The latter is a narrative structuring principle, a rhetorical figure of melodrama. The former informs narrative content but is not a tragic figure. Instead, the biracial beauty is a product of multiculturalism and the fight to add new identity categories to the 1990 census. Berry appears in films like *Monster's Ball* because she embodies the biracial beauty more readily accepted by mainstream audiences. That Halle Berry is currently enjoying wider celebrity than Angela Bassett can thus be understood in terms of the industrial production of stars and celebrities. Berry's celebrity is not a function of innate talent but a result of the fact that she has been more successfully produced by the culture industries as possessing a brand of marketable charisma, much like her role model, Dorothy Dandridge.

It's a noteworthy coincidence that Halle Berry (like Dorothy Dandridge before her) found career-making roles in films where her café-au-lait complexion proved pivotal to the racial content and sexual subtext of the film. The Dandridge biographies tell of how frequently studios manipulated the appearance of her complexion to suit particular parts. What has changed in a generation is the nature of metaphors for the white sexual consumption of racial "others." Hays Code-era cinema forbade "miscegenation" while blacklisted directors and exploitation pictures flaunted such liaisons. Today's art-house films—striving for currency with shifting demographics, interracial unions, and crossover hip-hop culture—try have it both ways: subtly in your face. Take Hank's chocolate ice cream eating and "tasting nigger-juice" as examples: too bad these metaphors for what bell hooks termed "eating the other" are cruder and more clichéd than ever before.[29]

With the Hank/Leticia relationship, *Monster's Ball* directly and indirectly addresses the entangled discourses of race, gender, class, sexuality, and the prison industrial complex. Because it is set in the South, the film invites us to place it in the context of American race relations. So, it's in this framework that many viewers interpreted the film's sex scenes as reproducing the pornographic gaze at the black female body, thereby re-stigmatizing black feminine sexuality.[30] Rather than view it solely as reproducing racial stereotypes, we should acknowledge that *Monster's Ball* is disturbing because of its voyeuristic treatment of working-class women's sexuality.

Throughout the film, spectators are aligned with Hank's perspective. As we watch the movie, Hank watches Leticia—waiting for her to lose control, waiting to provide her assistance, waiting to intervene. And, eventually, she makes her coarse plea for help, her groan of pleasure, and her sigh of relief. The dynamics of class are equally operative in the vulgar construction of Leticia's desperate appeals. Moreover, the very vehicle the film uses to present black women as desirable (Hank's diligent paternalism) ultimately functions to redeem white racism more than liberate (or denigrate) representations of black female sexuality.

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Notes

1. African-American sitcoms have become particularly well known, such as *My Wife and Kids, The Hugleys, The Bernie Mac Show, Girlfriends, Half & Half, Whoopi,* and *The Dave Chappelle Show*.
2. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (Continuum: New York, 2002), 88.
3. Floating signifier as a term was introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe a word or expression that does not have a meaning so much as hold open a space for that which exceeds expression.
4. Abby Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender and White Supremacy* (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 35.
5. Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 27.

6. Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Theorizing Masculinities,* ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 127.
7. Paul Sweezy, Harry Magdoff, John B. Foster, Robert McChesney, "Prisons and Executions—the U.S. Model: A Historical Introduction," *Monthly Review,* volume 53, no. 3 (July-August, 2001): 1-18. There is a long tradition of protest against convict leasing and the evolution of prison culture in the United States. Scholars from Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois to Angela Davis have written extensively on the subject.
8. Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996), 4.
9. "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader,* ed. Joy James (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 75.
10. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 506. See also Sweezy et al., op. cit.: 8.
11. Julia Sudbury, "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex," *Feminist Review,* 70 (2002): 57-74.
12. Ibid., 60.
13. Lichtenstein, 4.
14. Clifford Thompson, "Monster's Ball" in *Cineaste,* Summer 2002.
15. Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Perseus Books, 2002), 85-174.
16. Crystal L. Keels, "*Monster's Ball*: Hollywood's Grotesque History and/or Something Else Besides?" *Black Camera,* vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 4-5.
17. Ferber, *White Man Falling*, 135.
18. Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Theorizing Masculinities,* 128-129.
19. Margaret K. Bass, "On Being a Fat Black Girl in a Fat-Hating Culture," in *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women,* ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa Dickerson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 228.
20. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 21.
21. Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means," in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 330.
22. Although this movie problematically links Leticia's lustful cravings to her financial circumstances, it salvages her moral fiber by presenting her as a sexually respectable woman. Her brand of womanhood stands in opposition to that of the only other sexually viable woman in the film, Vera. In juxtaposing the white prostitute and black waitress, the film calls attention to the paucity of employment choices/opportunities available to working-class women. Clearly, the narrative more readily dismisses Vera's brand of working-poor womanhood, since it is through this black/white contrast that her livelihood seems a preference rather than a consequence of economic opportunity.
23. Zondra Hughes, "Has Hollywood Really Changed?" *Ebony,* June 2002.
24. Allison Samuels, "Angela's Fire," *Newsweek* 1 July 2002: 55.
25. The numbers tell the story: until Sidney Poitier won the Oscar for best actor in 1963 for *Lilies of the Field,* no black actor or actress had ever won an Oscar for a lead role. (Hattie McDaniel won a supporting actress award for *Gone With the Wind* in 1939.) And in the 38 Academy Award ceremonies since Poitier's breakthrough, no other black actor or actress has won for a lead role. Despite 780 total acting nominations and 152 winners since Poitier's Oscar, only four of those winners have been black, and all were recognized for supporting roles: Louis Gossett Jr. in *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982), Washington in *Glory* (1989), Whoopi Goldberg in *Ghost* (1990), and Cuba Gooding Jr. in *Jerry Maguire* (1996).
26. Greg Braxton and Anne Valdespino, "Dust-Up Over an Oscar Role," *L.A. Times,* 1 July 2002.
27. Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 27.
28. Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7.
29. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).
30. If we want to be generous to the film, however, we might argue that it foregrounds the isolation and desperation of America's working poor through complex characters presented in a carefully paced film.

Abstract More African Americans appear on network and cable television than ever before. Yet there are few quality dramatic roles for black actresses. The critical attention and public controversy surrounding Marc Forster's *Monster's Ball* (2001) demonstrated the existence of an audience for independent, art-house cinema featuring serious African-American characters. It's unfortunate that when read against the identity categories of race, gender, class, and region, Halle Berry's Leticia Musgrove seems to be a conflation of stereotypes: the sexual siren and the welfare queen.

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Annual Film Book Survey

Part II

Alfred Hitchcock

A Life in Darkness and Light

By Patrick McGilligan. New York: Regan Books/Harper Collins Publishers, 2003. $39.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

Patrick McGilligan provides a partial key to the logic of this lengthy, highly readable biography in its initial pages when he acknowledges that Hitchcock "perfected a mask of jovial sangfroid" (3) and "made a game of his identity in life"(4). Because Hitchcock revealed so little of himself to others and left so few obvious traces of his inner life, McGilligan often relies upon Hitchcock's official biography, John Russell Taylor's *The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock,* for personal details, as well as Francois Truffaut's *Hitchcock,* both of which the director vetted before publication. In keeping with his aim "to take stock of all the new Hitchcock findings of the last twenty years" (794), McGilligan also incorporates the factual details of external events chronicled in the many publications that have appeared during this time tracing the production histories of various Hitchcock's films. Of these, he most often cites with assurance Bill Krohn's *Hitchcock at Work.*

Like Hitchcock, McGilligan refuses to analyze the meanings of the films, noting that "analyzing his films is a particular lunacy of academics" (749). Instead, he focuses upon the same external details of the scripting, casting, and production of each film, along with an explanation of a shot in each film whose achievement demonstrates Hitchcock's technical ability. In approaching the films in this manner he seeks to redirect attention from Hitchcock's alleged personal kinks and quirks to his mastery of technique.

As the biography's subtitle hints, another publication of the last 20 years is never far from McGilligan's thoughts: Donald Spoto's *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock,* which attempts to construe Hitchcock's hidden motivations and obsessions from his films. Early on, McGilligan acknowledges how different Taylor's and Spoto's accounts of Hitchcock's childhood are. McGilligan suggests that Taylor's account of Hitchcock's happy childhood "seems closer to the mark. Although maybe it was both: a boyhood not all darkness, nor all sunshine, but like a Hitchcock film, a constant interplay of light and shadow"(11). As even-handed as this conclusion sounds, in practice McGilligan strives to present a warmer, more congenial and considerate Alfred Hitchcock than one would expect from reading Spoto's biography. McGilligan suggests that his biography is higher-minded: "Spoto's portrait has stuck in people's minds, perhaps because it is easier to imagine a manipulative egoist and monster, a shriveled soul inside a grossly fat man, than to understand the practical artist who gave his life to film" (747). Not surprisingly, much of the biography attempts to refute Spoto's assertions.

Thus, McGilligan repeatedly tries to account for Spoto's claims of Hitchcock's sadomasochistic actions as either outright exaggerations or misunderstandings of the director's assumed tyranny and playfulness. And insofar as the practical jokes Hitchcock inflicted upon others are concerned, the meanest were visited upon those who most deserved them, such as Walter Mycroft, acting head of production at British International Pictures in 1930. "Mycroft's importance was eclipsed only by his self-importance, and he was growingly despised as an arbitrary manager and despot. He became the object of vicious practical jokes concocted by Hitchcock and others on the lot" (133).

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McGilligan explains away the director's apparently cruel treatment of actors as a purposeful, practical contrivance. Though he may have seemed to goad or ignore them, Hitchcock cannily adopted "an attitude toward his actors that the story took toward their characters." He assaulted Madeleine Carroll's dignity on the set of *The 39 Steps* in order to "prepare her for her on-screen indignities" (174). Similarly, while shooting *Rebecca* he isolated Joan Fontaine from the other actors and told her they disliked her. "Hitchcock built up his power over Fontaine while keeping her nervous and vulnerable enough to enhance the nervous, vulnerable character she was playing" (250). If McGilligan is to be believed, even though Hitchcock despised method acting, he repeatedly inflicted method suffering to enhance the performance of his key actors.

To counter Spoto's most troubling allegations about Hitchcock's sexual designs on his leading ladies, McGilligan often sounds like a defense attorney working his hardest to raise reasonable doubts in the minds of his readers. For example, in response to Spoto's claim that near the end of shooting on *Marnie* Hitchcock made a "vulgar proposition" to Tippi Hedren, something so vile, McGilligan claims, that Hedren would not repeat the exact words when Spoto interviewed her, McGilligan offers a paragraph of doubts:

> So, what happened exactly? What if this despicable secret would look merely foolish if explained in print? What if Hitchcock was thinking like Mark Rutland, telling Hedren how sexy and attractive she was, how much he wanted to sleep with her? What if he really *did* want to sleep with her? Or What if, while trying very hard to patch things up with his leading lady, he made one of his clumsiest attempts at tongue-kissing, or just a clumsy, vulgar joke? (647)

Perhaps sensing, as I do, that these questions are not enough to exonerate Hitchcock from the actress's charges, McGilligan ends his discussion of the incident with a cheap shot denigrating Hedren's acting ability: ". . . her future as an actress was not grand" (649).

Oddly enough, as critical as McGilligan is of Spoto's claims about Hitchcock's sexual obsessions with his actresses, for some reason he is not above revealing Alma Reville's affair with Whitfield Cook, a close friend of the Hitchcocks, after the two of them returned to California while Hitchcock remained in England completing production of *Under Capricorn* (427-428). Perhaps McGilligan reveals the affair to increase a reader's sympathy for Hitchcock. The revelation of the liaison, however, like the liaison itself, appears and disappears without consequence, leaving one to wonder what purpose McGilligan means for it to serve.

As previous paragraphs suggest, McGilligan asserts repeatedly that Spoto's critical view of Hitchcock was based largely upon interviews with people who had long-standing personal grudges against the director. McGilligan assembles counter-testimony. If Charles Bennett and Sidney Gilliat, among others, claim that Hitchcock treated writers poorly throughout his career, McGilligan counters with Hitchcock's warm, lifelong relationship with Samson Raphaelson and his successful effort to rehabilitate the alcoholic Angus McPhail by hiring him as a writer on the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Indeed, it was another writer with an animus against Hitchcock, John Michael Hayes, whose complaint to the Writer's Guild about the writing credits for that film prevented McPhail from receiving the onscreen credit he deserved.

McGilligan even manages to use his discovery of six previously unknown sketches Hitchcock published between 1919 and 1921 in *The Henley Telegraph* while employed at the Telegraph Works to counter Spoto. Unlike the somewhat sadistic "Gas," the previously-known sketch published in the Taylor and Spoto biographies, McGilligan characterizes these half-dozen stories published here for the first time as revealing Hitchcock's "more humane, playful, faceted sensibility" (32). Oddly enough, even though these qualities epitomize the Hitchcock that McGilligan seems intent upon presenting, none of these things are revealed in his formulaic and flat comments on Hitchcock's films. McGilligan never explains his willingness to interpret Hitchcock's sensibility from these brief sketches, while declining to do the same with the much more substantial body of the director's films. Unfortunately, technical proficiency is not the same as artistic sensibility. If Hitchcock would not reveal, or could not articulate, his own sensibilities, it would seem from this biography (and, in fairness, from the Taylor and Spoto biographies as well) that neither was there anyone one else among his colleagues able or willing to offer any insights. By dismissing critical analysis as academic "lunacy," McGilligan dismisses the very group struggling the hardest to discern clues to Hitchcock's sensibilities through his films. I am amazed that McGilligan finds virtually nothing about the films, in theme or technique, in two decades of interpretive Hitchcock scholarship that suggests the slightest insight into Hitchcock's inner life.

It is instructive in this regard that with little more to go on about her subject's motivations, Ginette Vincendeau draws intriguing insights into Jean-Pierre Melville's personality from his films in *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003). Vincendeau can attempt to discern Melville's beliefs and motivations in his films because she knows that her specialized audience is willing to consider her conjectures. Even if her readers are unfamiliar with Melville's films, they are auteurist enough in outlook to assume a connection between his films and his personal beliefs.

In contrast, by choosing to write for a general audience, an audience only superficially aware of Hitchcock's films and with little patience for interpretative analyses, McGilligan unavoidably limits his biography to such externals as what Hitchcock said about himself, how he treated those around him, and what others said about him. While the approach of allowing one opinion to call another into question is an adequate strategy for casting doubts on Spoto's claims, it is incapable of offering any alternative insights. His general audience effectively prevents McGilligan from fully refuting Spoto through an alternative interpretation of the

films. Instead, McGilligan is left to pile one rhetorical question upon another, as he does in attempting to refute Tippi Hedren, or set one person's opinion against another, as in the question of Hitchcock's treatment of writers, but in no way does he construct a convincing counter-argument. By choosing to write a biography without attempting to discern any trace of his subject's life in the films, McGilligan has limited *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* to the facts of a life's work without insight into the life itself.

Marshall Deutelbaum is co-editor with Leland Poague of *A Hitchcock Reader,* and teaches courses in film history and theory at Purdue University.

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Black, White, and in Color

Television and Black Civil Rights

By Sasha Torres. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003. $49.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

In *Black, White, and in Color,* Sasha Torres maps the development of American commercial television in the latter half of the twentieth century onto that of the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Yet her book represents a departure from the methods of previous studies of "television and black civil rights," including J. Fred MacDonald's *Blacks and White TV* and Donald Bogle's recent *Prime Time Blues,* in two significant ways. First, as Torres notes in her cogent introduction, several of the histories of black Americans and/on TV have addressed the content of black-themed programming—specifically, they catalogue instances of racial stereotyping and "negative images"—to the exclusion of analysis of the formal strategies by which that content has been represented and of the diverse ways in which that content has been received by viewers (4). Second, Torres' book provides more of a snapshot than a mosaic. Whereas surveys on the topic by definition encompass many periods, programs, and people, Torres has chosen to focus very precisely on two important historical moments (and representational modes) within the development she charts: network information-based programming from 1955 to 1965 (the "civil rights era") and network fictional programming in the 1990s. These two divergences from the norm are the sources of both the book's major strengths and some of its weaknesses; its textual analysis is not always well integrated with its reception study, for instance. But at its best, Torres' book persuasively and eloquently challenges some of the received notions about television and black civil rights struggles.

The first two of the book's five chapters present a convincing case for the primacy of racial difference in the emergence of network television journalism. Contrary to MacDonald's account of TV in the period spanning the Montgomery bus boycott and the Watts riots, the simultaneous success of both telejournalism and the Civil Rights Movement was not simply a fortuitous coincidence; nor was the Movement merely the happy beneficiary of the networks' newfound commitment to news and documentary production. Rather, Torres notes, the racial awareness stimulated by civil rights activities was essential to the very evolution of "serious" TV journalism: the "flagship" documentary series that helped the networks weather the public relations scandals of the late 1950s and early 1960s depended on the Movement for "vivid pictures and clear-cut stories," as well as "political and cultural *gravitas*" (15). Torres attributes this reliance on race issues to the northern-based networks' need to reestablish control over their southern affiliates—control they had ceded to those affiliates in the 1950s through the purging of specifically black-themed entertainment programming (*The Nat King Cole Show,* most famously) from network schedules (22). Both network executives and Movement leaders understood the importance for their organizations of forging a "*national* consensus on the range of race's possible meanings" (6). This importance was, for black Americans, political and, for the networks, economic. But despite this disparity in motive, these groups together strove to reach a common goal—securing civil rights for Americans of color—because it was in the best interest of both. It's a provocative argument that is ably supported and supplemented by records preserved in the Martin Luther King Library and Archives; these and a variety of secondary resources help to vividly illustrate the awareness of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leaders of this symbiotic relationship between medium and movement.

Chapter Two expands on these assertions via a case study: a celebrated 1960 *NBC White Paper* on black civil disobedience. Through close textual analysis of *Sit-In,* a documentary account of that spring's sit-in demonstrations in Nashville and the hostile white reaction those protests engendered, Torres reveals how the program's use of a flashback structure (which presents the desegregation efforts documented within as "inevitable") implicitly belies its claims of impartiality and objectivity. This is a crucial move, given, Torres reiterates, the networks' "interest in the abolition of marked sectional differences in the understanding of race and its meaning, because such differences impeded their ability to construct their address—and the address of their advertisements—as *national*" (38). The use of formal analysis to uncover these necessarily covert strategies makes sense; however, the author's appeals to the coded meanings of the *Sit-In* text to explain the program's subsequent life as a recruiting tool for African American activists seems superfluous. According to Torres, *Sit-In* was embraced by civil rights organizations because it at times bypasses white viewers altogether in order to directly address working-class blacks, but the textual support for this contention—based, for example, on the match between the phrase "dangerous time" spoken in voiceover and the image of black women carrying shopping bags while another is escorted into a police wagon (46)—is rather tenuous. Having already established the program's supportive view of civil rights efforts, Torres doesn't really need to go to such lengths to explain the appeal of *Sit-In* for civil rights workers.

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The remainder of *Black, White, and in Color* tracks television's part in the post-"civil rights era" assault on race-based public policy. Whereas televised documentary during the Movement's peak years of national visibility encouraged the viewer's identification with black victims and against white oppressors, the terms were reversed in 1990s (post-Rodney King) fictional programming, which followed the lead of 1980s television news: viewers were now encouraged to identify against black criminals and with white victims. Whereas the coverage of civil rights protests in the 1950s and 1960s typically cast police as the brutalizers, 1990s TV dramas idealized and encouraged an identification with "the state power of the police" (11). To explain this shift, Torres shifts methodologies; the final three chapters are less informed by a political economy approach and more clearly rooted in ideological analysis. As a result, the reasons for television's about-face are less clear. The motives behind the networks' *ideological* alignment with the conservative forces that have dominated the American political landscape over the past two decades are not hard to fathom; still, Torres has little to say about them, and this lack of attention paid to the *economic* factors influencing recent televisual representations of "blackness"—after building a very convincing case upon just those factors in the first two chapters—is curious.

Nevertheless, the more pronounced theoretical turn in the latter half of the book produces several valuable insights. Torres profitably borrows from José Muñoz's reworking of Jane Feuer's conception of "liveness" to explain television's obsession with "representing live and authentic African Americans on screen." Because of the insolubility of racial conflict and the continued subjugation of Americans of color—"those whom society has most violently assaulted"—in recent years, television's role as partner in hegemony has been to make these subjects "alive again *within representation*" (49). But the African Americans made alive again within fictional programming, especially after the L.A. Rebellion, more often than not have functioned largely according to the threats they pose to white bodies. In her book's most thoroughgoing and fascinating instance of textual deconstruction, Torres demonstrates how this was accomplished in the 1992 fall season premieres of *L.A. Law* and *Doogie Howser, M.D.* Both episodes commented directly on the real-life uprising in Los Angeles through the integration of their stock characters into the event. In its presentation the former evokes the surveillance-informed style of television news coverage of the Rebellion, and thus encourages the alignment of "our gaze as viewers with liveness's gaze" (60). *Doogie Howser,* somewhat unexpectedly, in contrast offers a tentative critique of this presumption of a "universalized reception," yet still participates in the networks' project to reclaim the tropes of "immediacy" and "authenticity" from amateur video documentarists (like George Holliday, bystander to Rodney King's beating) and to promote "bourgeois white heterosexuality" as the preferred way to heal the trauma inflicted by black urban revolt (54).

Formal analysis plays a central role in Chapter Four as well, in which Torres plumbs visual style in the September 1997 series premiere of CBS's controversial cop show *Brooklyn South* for further signs of "the national fetishization of 'law and order'" (71). The episode's shockingly violent opening scene, in which a black fugitive opens fire on a group of police officers, encourages identification with the madman's victims through, to cite one example, the persistent evocation of the besieged cops' optical and (via a high-angle crane shot) figurative points of view. The resulting foreclosure of alternative viewpoints is in fact, Torres argues, rare for a 1990s "quality" cop show, many of which build "a number of positions . . . into characterization or narrative structure." Consequently, by so strictly denying its viewers the opportunity to engage in "resistant, oppositional, or disidentificatory readings," *Brooklyn South* validates, for Torres, the racially differentiated modes of policing encouraged by the policy decisions and public rhetoric—documented here in damning detail—of New York's "law and order" mayor, Rudolph Giuliani (78). The program, though filmed before the infamous August 1997 assault of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima by NYPD officers, nonetheless illuminates the conditions under which such a monstrous attack is possible.

As arresting an example as *Brooklyn South* provides, this chapter more than any other calls into question Torres' decision to ground her book's theses in very focused case studies. If Torres intends for the reader to conclude that *Brooklyn South* is representative of a larger ideological project to justify racist policing and the criminalization of the black underclass, then her analysis would benefit considerably from additional examples of how this project is manifest on 1990s television. One police drama that the author references only in passing, NBC's long-running and critically lauded *Homicide: Life On the Street,* would have made for an especially fascinating comparison with *Brooklyn South*. Like its CBS counterpart, *Homicide* employed a "transgressive" visual style, and it too posited a criminal class disproportionately made up of persons of color. But unlike *Brooklyn South, Homicide* was an exemplary "quality" program in that it seemingly presented many different identificatory positions: a tactic that is essential to "quality" television's rhetoric of realism and objectivity. ("Quality" fiction television's parallels with the 1950s and 1960s documentary series studied in the opening chapters are striking, indeed, and are alone worthy of further comment.)

In order to more safely generalize from *Brooklyn South* to the cop show genre, Torres would benefit from an explication of how even a "quality" show like *Homicide* or ABC's *NYPD Blue* has mobilized (and, in the case of the latter, continues to mobilize) similarly reprehensible racialized connotations. Instead, *Black, White, and in Color* concludes with a chapter on three movies from the early 1990s (*Malcolm X, Ricochet,* and *Menace II Society*) that "imagine television as playing a central role in constituting black subjectivity, publicity, and political effectivity" (90). This sudden swing from an analysis of television to an analysis of movies about television is jarring and, perhaps, misplaced; the final chapter's abrupt climax (in which Torres rightly critiques the "historically intractable closure of television to

the representation of African American women," yet devotes less than a page to the issue) and the book's lack of a formal conclusion contribute to a sense of incompleteness (107). Ideally, the somewhat limited scope of *Black, White, and in Color*—the book's five chapters total only 95 pages—would be expanded to better complete our understanding of the transformation of network television's position on black civil rights from one of advocacy to opposition. Still, Sasha Torres has succeeded in crafting a solid theoretical framework that will undoubtedly aid and inspire future scholarly efforts toward a more nuanced understanding of blacks and white television.

Christopher Sieving is a visiting instructor in the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame.

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Cinema of Interruptions

Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema

By Lalitha Gopalan. London: British Film Institute, 2002.
$65.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Ambition is alluded to several times in Lalitha Gopalan's *Cinema of Interruptions,* and indeed the book is that—ambitious. For it wants nothing less than to propose a new theoretical framework for comprehending the distinctiveness of India's national cinema, as that cinema has been (and continues to be) shaped from within the confines of a global system of commercial filmmaking dominated by Hollywood. Given the paucity of serious-minded studies of the Indian popular film industry relative to the size of that cultural behemoth, this book's ambition is welcome, even if the work does lumber and ultimately get ensnared in its own theoretical web.

Intelligently, Gopalan limits her scope to the action-gangster genre in order to talk about Indian cinema as a "constellation of interruptions"—that is, as an almost codified set of gaps that have become the stuff out of which, and around which, expectation in Indian film is built. These conventionalized stops and sequences include song-and-dance numbers; the cinematic "withdrawal" of the camera from the female body, thanks to national censorship codes; and even the ten-minute intermission that punctuates virtually all Hindi films. The energy that directors expend on the placement of these, contends Gopalan, produces a kind of pleasure—a pleasure "*in* these interruptions and not *despite* them. Indian cinema is marked by *interrupted pleasures*." Such constellations and their innumerable effects are of course never addressed in contemporary film theory, overly grounded as it is in a Western sensibility. Hence Gopalan's desire to reconfigure such theory—not to mention our very understanding of, say, a genre like the Western: we need to take into account how a cinema like India's might import the global in a manner that belies straightforward appropriation, that in fact succeeds at rewriting the hegemonic, permitting both regional novelty and a unique horizon of address.

The tensions between local and global cinematic styles are highlighted in *Cinema of Interruptions* via a series of close readings of thematically linked films, with each chapter exploring "the ways in which interruptions are yoked to the structuring of global genres and how [Gopalan's] own reading strategies inherited from film theory accommodate local difference." An especially refreshing aspect of her analytical *modus operandi* is the way that she does not limit her analyses (as most extant books on Indian popular film do) to Bollywood alone, that is, to the Hollywood of Bombay, with its undeniable north Indian, homogenizing slant. Instead, she pulls from both north and south, referencing Tamil cinema, Telugu cinema, and others, and, in this way, assesses Indian popular cinema from a much wider vantage point than is often offered in scholarship in film studies.

First to be scrutinized and theorized in the book are the "avenging female" action films of the 1980s. Accoutered with feminist film theory, Gopalan posits that the very structuring of these films, and the type of spectatorial pleasure that they engender, has been encouraged by censorship regulations regarding the woman's body. But Gopalan does not wish us to see the former as necessarily or exclusively vulgarizing the former, but rather as inducing a "*productive tension* that marks the cinematic materiality of Indian films." The device of camera-coitus interruptus, wherein the lens withdraws from the female body (during song, during dance, during rape), is, in other words, indispensable to the pleasure of almost showing it all and actually generates a kind of sado-masochistic satisfaction. (Consequently, the need to balance out rape with revenge, permitting viewers to read that pleasure-inducing rape "retrospectively.")

The ensuing four chapters turn to more blatantly masculine interests and affairs. In "Masculinity at the Interval in J.P. Dutta's Films," the subject is how male Hollywood genres are reworked and undercut through "interrupting the linear narratives of action with local conventions, particularly the interval." Gopalan insists that the ten-minute intermission is "the bedrock of our comprehension of the structuring of narrative expectation, development, and closure in Indian cinemas" and a distinctive form of cinematic interposition that "shifts the structure of anticipation and pleasure" of the Western and gangster genres. Interestingly, Gopalan acknowledges that Dutta himself was "reluctant to accord any significant weight to the interval" and preferred that his films be attended to as a whole. Still, close readings of several of J.P. Dutta's films are provided as testimonial apropos this interval theory, and also as a route to revealing the "tenuous links between homosociality and homoeroticism in these genres."

Other directors' works are also meticulously scrutinized for the manner in which they reconfigure global genres via local conventions. Chapter Four focuses on Mani Ratnam and his creative modes of handling temporality, whether through evoking the past, disrupting his own linearity by way of commodity culture (in this case, cars), or converting the conventional anachrony of song-and-dance numbers into

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something more narratively integrated. Chapter Five swings to Vidhu Vinod Chopra and his methods of "grafting interruptions with gangster film conventions through [an] innovative use of flashbacks." Finally, Kamal Hassan's work is highlighted for the manner in which it stretches the limits of metaphoric substitution (as spawned by state censorship) through use of digital technologies.

Ultimately, then, the book comes to focus on directors who can handle the "constellation of interruptions" *well*—or, at the least, with recognizable auteurist leanings. In this manner, *Cinema of Interruptions* is indeed attempting something bold and noteworthy and suitably ambitious: the recognition of artistic signature as it is metaphorically inscribed on celluloid from *within* the formula-film-molded world of Indian cinema. In this way, the book is reminiscent of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics' appreciative appraisals of Hollywood films directed by the likes of John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock. But unlike the latter's sensitive, often conversationally-toned cinephilic readings of discrete films, Gopalan unfortunately tries in her study to incorporate too much—too many cross-cutting theorizations, too many subthemes and analytical digressions, too many broad assertions often encased in jargon and tenuously connected or ineffectively proven in a narrow focus on a handful of films from a handful of directors. (The chapter on J.P. Dutta's films, for instance, traverses bumpily through discussion of the interval, close textual analysis of three of his films, the significance of train tracks in his movies, spectatorship and tourism in his movies, homoeroticism in his movies. . . .) In other words, there are far too many interruptions that ultimately obscure the reader's ability to sit cerebrally with this theory of interruptions.

Perhaps this is the byproduct of contemporary film theory, with its heterodox sensitivity and wary insistence upon multiple addresses and multiple reading strategies multiplied to create matrices that sometimes inadvertently result in any initial theoretical intentions (not to mention, the films themselves) getting oscillatingly lost in the shuffle. The work, in this manner, bears (and bares) the weaknesses of the overapplication of current film theory. Or maybe it is simply that too many threads—each of them discretely valuable—are pulled by Gopalan from the fabric of Indian popular film but then just as easily abandoned, producing a kind of shaggy carpet of close analysis, cinephilic aggrandizing, and skittish (but semantically dense) theoretical application.

Still, Gopalan delves into arenas heretofore unexplored, and she offers up insights with both scholarly acumen and a respectful approach that are sure to please those already initiated into the world of Indian popular cinema.

Sheila J. Nayar is an assistant professor of English and communication studies at Greensboro College, in North Carolina. She is currently working on a book entitled *Cinematically Speaking: The Orality-Literacy Paradigm for Visual Narrative*.

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The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow

Hollywood Transgressor

Edited by Deborah Jermyn & Sean Redmond. London: Wallflower Press, 2003. $55.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

Hollywood Transgressor—this seemingly oxymoronic title perfectly sums up the tensions and contradictions that characterize Kathryn Bigelow, one of the most interesting action directors in recent film history and the subject of this essential anthology of critical writings. On the one hand, Bigelow is firmly entrenched in the Hollywood establishment as a filmmaker who often works with big budgets, big stars, and big studios on projects that could be perceived as formula fare. Yet like Sam Fuller, Budd Boetticher, and other old Hollywood masters, Bigelow both satisfies and transcends the demands of formula to create cinema that's ideologically complex, viscerally thrilling, and highly personal.

Deborah Jermyn and Sean Redmond's introduction to the collection addresses the complexity of Bigelow as a subject, suggesting that she's a European-style auteur who challenges social, political, and sexual orthodoxy, yet does it from within the Hollywood industrial machine. The editors give attention to all the facets of Bigelow's sensibility in a manner that's refreshing given the general lack of comprehension one finds in most writings about the director. Whereas Bigelow's detractors see her as a skilled technician who wastes her formidable intelligence on dopey popcorn movies, her supporters sometimes err on the side of denying her genuine love of and talent for Hollywood action cinema in order to force her into the position of art house auteur—a designation that is just as inappropriate as that of mainstream hack.

While Bigelow is never content to regurgitate familiar ideas or to stage action in a routine manner, she's also a passionate fan of Anthony Mann and Walter Hill who delivers the action movie goods not as a concession to popular taste but because she genuinely adores the exhilaration that a well-choreographed action sequence provides. Yet while Bigelow may love Hollywood cinema, she's out to change it too—there aren't many other studio filmmakers who use popular genres to dig as deeply into feminist issues as *Blue Steel* does or to examine the relationships between technology, media, sex, race, and class with the level of complexity on display in *Strange Days*. As Jermyn and Redmond note in their introduction, they and their contributors "are acknowledging how [Bigelow's] work partly falls within *and* partly infringes the parameters of Hollywood cinema."

This idea is elaborated upon to great effect in two early essays in the collection, Sara Gwenllian Jones and Stephen Jay Schneider's pieces on Bigelow's vampire Western *Near Dark*. Jones focuses on the manner in which the director plays with the conventions of both the horror film and the Western to create a highly original work that explores homosexuality and "white America's illusion of safety and control." Schneider reaches a similar conclusion via a different method; like Jones, he feels that *Near Dark* is a politically radical text, but he uses psychoanalysis rather than genre criticism to make his case. Robert T. Self uses a similar

something more narratively integrated. Chapter Five swings to Vidhu Vinod Chopra and his methods of "grafting interruptions with gangster film conventions through [an] innovative use of flashbacks." Finally, Kamal Hassan's work is highlighted for the manner in which it stretches the limits of metaphoric substitution (as spawned by state censorship) through use of digital technologies.

Ultimately, then, the book comes to focus on directors who can handle the "constellation of interruptions" *well*—or, at the least, with recognizable auteurist leanings. In this manner, *Cinema of Interruptions* is indeed attempting something bold and noteworthy and suitably ambitious: the recognition of artistic signature as it is metaphorically inscribed on celluloid from *within* the formula-film-molded world of Indian cinema. In this way, the book is reminiscent of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics' appreciative appraisals of Hollywood films directed by the likes of John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock. But unlike the latter's sensitive, often conversationally-toned cinephilic readings of discrete films, Gopalan unfortunately tries in her study to incorporate too much—too many cross-cutting theorizations, too many subthemes and analytical digressions, too many broad assertions often encased in jargon and tenuously connected or ineffectively proven in a narrow focus on a handful of films from a handful of directors. (The chapter on J.P. Dutta's films, for instance, traverses bumpily through discussion of the interval, close textual analysis of three of his films, the significance of train tracks in his movies, spectatorship and tourism in his movies, homoeroticism in his movies. . . .) In other words, there are far too many interruptions that ultimately obscure the reader's ability to sit cerebrally with this theory of interruptions.

Perhaps this is the byproduct of contemporary film theory, with its heterodox sensitivity and wary insistence upon multiple addresses and multiple reading strategies multiplied to create matrices that sometimes inadvertently result in any initial theoretical intentions (not to mention, the films themselves) getting oscillatingly lost in the shuffle. The work, in this manner, bears (and bares) the weaknesses of the overapplication of current film theory. Or maybe it is simply that too many threads—each of them discretely valuable—are pulled by Gopalan from the fabric of Indian popular film but then just as easily abandoned, producing a kind of shaggy carpet of close analysis, cinephilic aggrandizing, and skittish (but semantically dense) theoretical application.

Still, Gopalan delves into arenas heretofore unexplored, and she offers up insights with both scholarly acumen and a respectful approach that are sure to please those already initiated into the world of Indian popular cinema.

Sheila J. Nayar is an assistant professor of English and communication studies at Greensboro College, in North Carolina. She is currently working on a book entitled *Cinematically Speaking: The Orality-Literacy Paradigm for Visual Narrative*.

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The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow

Hollywood Transgressor

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approach in his insightful assessment of *Blue Steel,* an aggressively feminist thriller that uses the conventions of male-oriented cop movies to undermine masculine authority.

Bigelow has directed or co-directed seven feature films, but over a third of *Hollywood Transgressor* is devoted to her most conceptually ambitious and politically controversial film, the science-fiction thriller *Strange Days*. *Strange Days* certainly warrants the attention, but given the amount of space devoted to it the book's perspective on this audacious film is somewhat limited. The movie encompasses an astonishing number of issues and subjects, including but not limited to: racial politics in post-Rodney King America; the complex relationship between technology and intimacy in the age of virtual reality and the internet; and the use of technology as a source of both liberation and oppression. *Strange Days* tackles these huge subjects and many others with precision and intelligence, yet Jermyn and Redmond's introduction refers to it as a thought-provoking but flawed film. Three of the four pieces chosen to represent the movie more or less support this assessment and in some cases focus as much on the film's box-office failure as any thematic or technical considerations. Romi Stepovich provides a meticulous account of the manner in which the film was financed and distributed and argues that *Strange Days* was doomed to box-office failure from the start due to co-writer and producer James Cameron's deal with Twentieth Century Fox. The issue of artistic achievement is irrelevant in this piece, which views the movie as a failure simply because it didn't make money.

Ironically, Will Brooker's essay on the internet fan base of *Strange Days* reinforces the notion that the movie isn't any good by quoting supporters whose defenses of the film are barely literate. Brooker's collection of excerpts from internet "critics" who mistakenly credit Bigelow's famous ex-husband Cameron with the direction of *Strange Days* is profoundly depressing—the supposed fans of the movie who Brooker finds on the web reduce its numerous layers and subjects to a geek's parlor game and oversimplify its meanings to the point that the film seems as stupid as Bigelow's detractors would have one believe.

This leaves the two remaining *Strange Days* commentators to do the heavy lifting of explicating the film's sophisticated content, and thankfully they're up to the task. Christina Lane's analysis places the movie in a historical context, examining it as a series of responses to various cultural crises, from Rodney King to Lorena Bobbitt. Steven Shaviro looks at *Strange Days* as a movie about the act of seeing itself. He makes instructive comparisons with Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* and analyzes the film's most notorious sequence (a scene in which the story's "SQUID" technology causes a woman to experience her own assault from the point of view of her attacker as she's being raped) in this context. Lane also invokes Powell's film when discussing the rape scene, but finds the sequence troubling from a feminist perspective. Like the editors of this book, she seems to somehow see Bigelow's presentation of the rape as a partial endorsement of it, when in fact, the scenes of rape and murder in the film are so brutal (and so effective, given Bigelow's usual expertise with framing and editing) that it's hard to imagine any viewer who isn't a sociopath having a reaction other than outright horror.

The minor limitations of the section on *Strange Days* are cancelled out by some intelligent analyses of Bigelow's more underrated pictures, specifically the editors' own contributions focusing on *The Weight of Water* (Jermyn) and *Point Break* (Redmond). *The Weight of Water* is Bigelow's most overlooked work; an independent production financed and produced on a modest scale, the movie went straight to video after a perfunctory theatrical run. Because of the film's limited locations and relative absence of physical action, many critics saw it as an anomaly in Bigelow's work, but Jermyn points out fascinating parallels between it and the director's earlier movies by viewing many of Bigelow's films as dark family melodramas. She also uses *The Weight of Water* as a springboard for discussing the critical reception of Bigelow's filmography as a whole, and of Bigelow herself as a cultural icon. As Jermyn notes, most of the writing about Bigelow has focused on what it means to be a "woman director," an "action director," or an "auteur," and in various ways *The Weight of Water*—and Bigelow's career in general—both fulfills and complicates these classifications.

Like *The Weight of Water, Point Break* initially seems like a departure for a director whose previous film (*Blue Steel*) is an overtly feminist work that deals with the various ways that male-dominated institutions seek to subjugate and control women. Yet in his essay on the male-oriented surfing and robbery epic, Redmond situates it within Bigelow's oeuvre by pointing out that the film focuses on a group of outsiders who form their own community in opposition to the traditional family unit—a theme that runs through *The Loveless* and *Near Dark* and with which *Blue Steel*'s depiction of domestic violence dovetails.

Redmond also asserts, somewhat less convincingly, that the movie is a radical critique of macho excess—that Bigelow's exaggeration of action movie clichés is so extreme that it points out their ridiculousness. This argument is a common one among Bigelow partisans, but the film itself offers more evidence that Bigelow pushes the macho behavior to extremes because she revels in it rather than disapproves of it. For many admirers of *Point Break* the film's melodramatic excesses, rather than being an embarrassment, are the source of the movie's pleasure, and there's little in Bigelow's presentation to indicate that she feels anything other than affection toward the alpha-males who comprise her cast of characters. If this is a critique, it's buried pretty far beneath the surface. Still, Redmond's piece is valuable for the way that it analyzes the one way in which *Point Break* does clearly comment on and parody other male action films: the overt homoeroticism that informs the story's central love triangle. Redmond also offers a sharp analysis of how the film's editing and camerawork indict the rigidity and conformity of the establishment while celebrating the freedom embodied by the surfers at the movie's center. Specifically, Redmond examines Bigelow's use of time as both a subject within the film and an aesthetic device for manipulating the audience.

While Redmond's essay on *Point Break* dissects Bigelow's manipulations of time and space, Robynn Stilwell con-

tributes a superb piece on the use of sound in the director's first three films. Whereas film scholars' tendency to prioritize the visual over the aural has led to extensive analyses of the cinematography, editing, and action choreography of Bigelow's work, her equally audacious use of sound has been almost entirely overlooked. Stilwell corrects this problem by dissecting the sound design and scoring of Bigelow's early works and revealing how sound adds another layer of irony and commentary to the movies.

The fact that the only major complaint that can be leveled at this collection is that there's so much more to be said about Bigelow and her films is a testament to both the breadth of the director's work and to the editors' achievement in filling such a gaping void in film studies. As the first collection devoted entirely to the career of this provocative director, *Hollywood Transgressor* covers a wide range of perspectives and topics—it incorporates auteur criticism, feminist and queer theory, psychoanalysis, and other academic approaches while examining Bigelow's films as aesthetic, economic, and political artifacts. Whether one agrees with the conclusions that the various authors in this book reach about Kathryn Bigelow and her movies, there's no denying that the pieces raise challenging questions and force the reader to reexamine not only Bigelow but the Hollywood in which she makes her living.

Jim Hemphill is a screenwriter and critic based in Los Angeles.

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From Moscow to Madrid

Postmodern Cities, European Cinema

By Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli. London and New York: IB Tauris and Company, 2003. $59.50 cloth; $24.50 paper.

In *From Moscow to Madrid,* Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli have combined their talents and expertise to examine the past two decades' cinema of the European city. Part One, "Old Europe," focuses on Madrid, Naples, and Marseilles. Part Two, "Postcommunist Europe," discusses Warsaw, Berlin, and Moscow. Part Three focuses on Great Britain in order to provide a more thoroughly elaborated case study—a variety of cities within an internally ambiguous national setting: London, Edinburgh, Swansea, and Blackpool.

With the exception of Edinburgh and Swansea (which share a chapter), each city is assigned one chapter. The first part of each chapter gives background information on the city's cinematic history—a helpful feature, as no one reader is likely to be thoroughly familiar with the films of every city. The remainder of the chapter "reads" the city through several films (by one to three directors). Again, ample introduction and description of each primary film render the book approachable even for a reader who might only be particularly versed in one or two national cinema traditions. Moreover, the organization allows the authors to include countries, cities, and films not traditionally central to many broad studies of European cinema.

For Madrid, the primary films are Pedro Almodóvar's *Kika* (1993) and *The Flower of My Secret* (1995); for Naples, Mario Martone's *Morte di un matematico napoletano* (1992), *L'amore molesto* (1995), and *Teatro di guerra* (1998); for Marseilles, Karim Dridi's *Bye-Bye* (1995), Claire Denis' *Nenette et Boni* (1996), and Robert Guédiguian's *Marius et Jeannette* (1998); for Warsaw, Juliusz Machulski's *Girl Guide* (1995) and *Kiler* (1997); for Berlin there is a break in the pattern and the authors engage in a broad survey rather than a more in-depth discussion of a limited number of films; for Moscow, Pavel Lungin's *Taxi Blues* (1990) and *Luna Park* (1992); for London, Roger Michell's *Notting Hill* (1999), Peter Howitt's *Sliding Doors* (1998), Jasmin Dizdar's *Beautiful People* (1998), and Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland* (1999); for Edinburgh, Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1995); for Swansea, Kevin Allen's *Twin Town* (1997); for Blackpool, Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and Peter Chelsom's *Funny Bones* (1994). This corpus of films from the last decade of the twentieth century juxtaposes some aesthetically challenging "art" cinema with more popular films, and introduces an Anglophone readership to films which did not necessarily enjoy wide theatrical releases in North America.

In their introduction, after a very brief overview of historical trends in city films, Mazierska and Rascaroli situate their argument within an intellectual framework that studies the city both as a text and as a representation. They explain that they wish to be attentive to the city as a built environment, and as a represented space. Thus their examination of the relationship between "the city" and cinema that refers to "real cities" (actual places which may be delineated cartographically), city-texts (the multiple representations of such places), and "lived-cities" (the visitor and inhabitant's experience of their urban environment). Chapter One, "From the USA to Europe: Development of a New City," is an illuminating articulation of the project's challenges in translating for the European case a mode of urban analysis which was developed in relationship to North America. This chapter lays out some fundamental characteristics of what Mazierska and Rascaroli define as the postmodern European city: a locus of difference and fragmentation characterized by diffusion and dispersion, cosmopolitanism, blurred boundaries between inner city/suburbia, the transplantation into a city's historical center of immigrant communities and a homogenization of cityscapes, reorganization of spaces through virtual connections and the recycling of once industrial sites, and the commodification of the city itself in a series of marketable "events." The authors conclude that although European cities are inevitably less postmodern than their North American counterparts, the variation within European urban postmodernities is in itself an element of what might be seen as the particular postmodernity of the European cinematic city.

Mazierska and Rascaroli do not shirk ventures into potentially controversial territory, such as what constitutes "European" cinema, relating such European cities to their

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Mazierska and Rascaroli do not shirk ventures into potentially controversial territory, such as what constitutes "European" cinema, relating such European cities to their

North American counterparts, and how to define a series of "posts": postmodernism, postmodernity, postmodern cinema, and the postmodern city. Above other theorists of postmodernism (François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari all make appearances in the text), the authors claim affiliation to Fredric Jameson. In what one can see as a successful performance of "postmodern" criticism's resistance to linear narrative and argumentation, the book seems at times to be slipping through a series of non-definitions—especially since at any moment (as is admitted in the introduction) the criteria used to distinguish the "postmodern" cinema and city are arguably shared by their "modern" predecessors. The issue is further complicated in that the elusive adjective "postmodern" is applied alternatively to cinematic practices and to the cities themselves. That is, certain chapters such as Chapter Two on Madrid/Almodóvar, tend to pull their focus toward the analysis of a postmodern cinema, while others, such as Chapter Ten on Blackpool, focus on cinematic representations (not necessarily postmodern in and of themselves) of postmodern cities. Throughout the text, the postmodern relationship between cinema and city is frequently characterized as absence: the cities and their cinemas are de-centered, alienated, non-monumental, empty, liminal, flat, coreless. By bringing together such a broad range of films in such a variety of cities, Mazierska and Rascaroli defamiliarize familiar and popular cityscapes in a book that, while informed by theoretical concerns, remains accessible for a broad readership.

Margaret C. Flinn is currently a tutor in the History and Literature program at Harvard University.

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The Garden in the Machine

A Field Guide to Independent Films About Place

By Scott MacDonald. Berkeley: University of California Press: 2001. $75.00 cloth; $35.00 paper.

Scott MacDonald is best known for his interviews with independent filmmakers, which he has collected in three books: *A Critical Cinema* (1988), *A Critical Cinema 2* (1992), and *A Critical Cinema 3* (1998). (The fourth volume is being published next year.) He also wrote *Avant-Garde Film/ Motion Studies* (1993) and edited *Screen Writings: Scripts and Texts by Independent Filmmakers* (1995).

The Garden in the Machine is an enormous leap beyond MacDonald's previous work. It is a comprehensive vision of independent film—the only one since the second edition of P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* in 1976. In one sense, the two books are complementary; in another sense, they are so different they seem to divide independent cinema between them. For anyone teaching, studying, or writing about avant-garde film, it is these two books—Sitney and MacDonald—that must be carefully examined and comprehended whole.

MacDonald's brief introduction is notable in that it says virtually nothing about the critical/theoretical methods with which he will engage 41 filmmakers, 52 films, and one videotape. He prefers to introduce his analytical perspectives just before a chapter's films or, in a few cases, after he has already discussed one or more of the chapter's films. What the introduction does provide is a brief account of how his book came to have the topics and the organization that it does. The 11 essays that follow, he says, are "the product of a decade-long intersection of . . . two explorations." The first is the fact that "since the late1970s, nearly all my scholarly and critical energies, and a substantial portion of my pedagogical energy, have been devoted to . . . avant-garde film." This is hardly a surprise to the many that know MacDonald's interviews in journals and in his collections. The second exploration he calls personal:

> I came to realize not only that I had spent fifteen years in central New York—twelve more than I had expected or planned—but that I was likely to spend many more years here. Central New York was becoming "my place," seemingly without my conscious participation. I decided, of course, to "make the best of it" and did so by finding my way into the Adirondacks and Catskills, and into the cultural history of the region. The more I learned about upstate New York, the more interested I became not only in this place but in places in general, in all their specificity and interconnectedness. Inevitably, given my professional commitments, my developing interest in history and geography came to include—came to focus on—the history and geography of the *depiction* of place in literature, painting and photography and especially in film and video.

MacDonald here places literature before painting, but in his book, paintings—nineteenth-century landscape paintings—are far more prominent than literature.

MacDonald begins his book proper in Chapter One, which has the same title as the book itself but with an altered subtitle: "Two American Avant-Garde Films and the Nineteenth-Century Visual Arts." The two films are *Fog Line* (1970) by Larry Gottheim and *Sky Blue Water Light Sign* (1972) by J. J. Murphy. Each is a single-shot film; the Gottheim ten and a half minutes long, the Murphy eight and a half.

About a third of the way through *Fog Line* the fog has begun to dispel sufficiently for the viewer to begin to perceive that the initial green blur is very like a landscape. Soon after, one perceives also that the image is crossed by two sets of power lines. MacDonald notes that "Gottheim's interest in the intersection of natural process and human technological development recalls one of the central themes of nineteenth-century American painting, a theme brilliantly dramatized in Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* (1836)." The left side of Cole's painting shows a wilderness that MacDonald calls "a physical and spiritual opportunity that the cultivated fields of the Connecticut Valley, on the right side of the painting, do not."

Sky Blue Water Light Sign does not document, and somehow "distort"—as first-time viewers sometimes think—

North American counterparts, and how to define a series of "posts": postmodernism, postmodernity, postmodern cinema, and the postmodern city. Above other theorists of postmodernism (François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari all make appearances in the text), the authors claim affiliation to Fredric Jameson. In what one can see as a successful performance of "postmodern" criticism's resistance to linear narrative and argumentation, the book seems at times to be slipping through a series of non-definitions—especially since at any moment (as is admitted in the introduction) the criteria used to distinguish the "postmodern" cinema and city are arguably shared by their "modern" predecessors. The issue is further complicated in that the elusive adjective "postmodern" is applied alternatively to cinematic practices and to the cities themselves. That is, certain chapters such as Chapter Two on Madrid/Almodóvar, tend to pull their focus toward the analysis of a postmodern cinema, while others, such as Chapter Ten on Blackpool, focus on cinematic representations (not necessarily postmodern in and of themselves) of postmodern cities. Throughout the text, the postmodern relationship between cinema and city is frequently characterized as absence: the cities and their cinemas are de-centered, alienated, non-monumental, empty, liminal, flat, coreless. By bringing together such a broad range of films in such a variety of cities, Mazierska and Rascaroli defamiliarize familiar and popular cityscapes in a book that, while informed by theoretical concerns, remains accessible for a broad readership.

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By Scott MacDonald. Berkeley: University of California Press: 2001. $75.00 cloth; $35.00 paper.

Scott MacDonald is best known for his interviews with independent filmmakers, which he has collected in three books: *A Critical Cinema* (1988), *A Critical Cinema 2* (1992), and *A Critical Cinema 3* (1998). (The fourth volume is being published next year.) He also wrote *Avant-Garde Film/ Motion Studies* (1993) and edited *Screen Writings: Scripts and Texts by Independent Filmmakers* (1995).

The Garden in the Machine is an enormous leap beyond MacDonald's previous work. It is a comprehensive vision of independent film—the only one since the second edition of P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* in 1976. In one sense, the two books are complementary; in another sense, they are so different they seem to divide independent cinema between them. For anyone teaching, studying, or writing about avant-garde film, it is these two books—Sitney and MacDonald—that must be carefully examined and comprehended whole.

MacDonald's brief introduction is notable in that it says virtually nothing about the critical/theoretical methods with which he will engage 41 filmmakers, 52 films, and one videotape. He prefers to introduce his analytical perspectives just before a chapter's films or, in a few cases, after he has already discussed one or more of the chapter's films. What the introduction does provide is a brief account of how his book came to have the topics and the organization that it does. The 11 essays that follow, he says, are "the product of a decade-long intersection of . . . two explorations." The first is the fact that "since the late1970s, nearly all my scholarly and critical energies, and a substantial portion of my pedagogical energy, have been devoted to . . . avant-garde film." This is hardly a surprise to the many that know MacDonald's interviews in journals and in his collections. The second exploration he calls personal:

> I came to realize not only that I had spent fifteen years in central New York—twelve more than I had expected or planned—but that I was likely to spend many more years here. Central New York was becoming "my place," seemingly without my conscious participation. I decided, of course, to "make the best of it" and did so by finding my way into the Adirondacks and Catskills, and into the cultural history of the region. The more I learned about upstate New York, the more interested I became not only in this place but in places in general, in all their specificity and interconnectedness. Inevitably, given my professional commitments, my developing interest in history and geography came to include—came to focus on—the history and geography of the *depiction* of place in literature, painting and photography and especially in film and video.

MacDonald here places literature before painting, but in his book, paintings—nineteenth-century landscape paintings—are far more prominent than literature.

MacDonald begins his book proper in Chapter One, which has the same title as the book itself but with an altered subtitle: "Two American Avant-Garde Films and the Nineteenth-Century Visual Arts." The two films are *Fog Line* (1970) by Larry Gottheim and *Sky Blue Water Light Sign* (1972) by J. J. Murphy. Each is a single-shot film; the Gottheim ten and a half minutes long, the Murphy eight and a half.

About a third of the way through *Fog Line* the fog has begun to dispel sufficiently for the viewer to begin to perceive that the initial green blur is very like a landscape. Soon after, one perceives also that the image is crossed by two sets of power lines. MacDonald notes that "Gottheim's interest in the intersection of natural process and human technological development recalls one of the central themes of nineteenth-century American painting, a theme brilliantly dramatized in Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* (1836)." The left side of Cole's painting shows a wilderness that MacDonald calls "a physical and spiritual opportunity that the cultivated fields of the Connecticut Valley, on the right side of the painting, do not."

Sky Blue Water Light Sign does not document, and somehow "distort"—as first-time viewers sometimes think—

a real scene. In fact, the film records a fabrication of an imagined scene: Murphy framed his shot to coincide with the border of a Hamm's beer "Sky Blue Water" sign so that it resembles an actual nature scene that is unfolding. MacDonald relates this work to a nineteenth-century phenomenon other than landscape painting: moving panoramas. He says that the light sign is "a modernized and miniaturized version of the moving panorama." It seems to me, however, that the film may also be read in a postmodernist way as skepticism that "nature" and cultural simulacra of nature can be confidently separated or even distinguished.

Chapter Two begins with Thomas Cole's set of four allegorical paintings: *The Voyage of Life: Childhood, Youth, Manhood, Old Age*. Only one film is considered in this chapter: Larry Gottheim's 77-minute film, *Horizons* (1973). MacDonald develops many interesting parallels between Gottheim's *Horizons* and Cole's tetralogy, notably the processes of thought by which each project developed. Gotheim had a Dantesque rhyming scheme in mind at the outset; but he adapted that scheme to make it more perceptible to the viewer. With Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* also in mind—and on the soundtrack—he organized *Horizons* according to the seasons. MacDonald devotes seven pages to Cole's tetralogy and another seven to Gottheim's *Horizons*. This is followed by a subtle, sinuous comparison of the two works that cannot be summarized here.

Having discussed only three film works in the first two chapters, in Chapter Three, "Avant-Gardens," MacDonald considers—around various notions of "gardens"—individual works by seven filmmakers: Kenneth Anger's *Eaux d'artifice* (1953), Marie Menken's *Glimse of the Garden* (1957), Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1967), Stan Brakhage's *The Garden of Early Delights* (1981), Marjorie Keller's *The Answering Furrow* (1985), Anne Charlotte Robertson's *Melon Patches, Or Reasons to Go on Living* (1994), and Rose Lowder's ecological cinema: *Bouquets 1-10* (1994-5).

The film work and writing of Anger, Schneemann, Brakhage, and Keller are well known and much esteemed. To concentrate on Ann Charlotte Robertson and Rose Lowder demonstrates another and most important side of MacDonald's work: his encouragement and celebration of striking new talent. To use a word that appears often in his book, MacDonald seems "energized" by the work of Robertson and Lowder. (MacDonald interviewed Robertson in 1990 and Lowder in 1992.)

If Ann Robertson as artist and person is by now rather widely known, it is in part because she forthrightly treats not only her disability but also her fantasies and obsessions. Since 1981 she has a kept a film diary. That very extensive diary has brought her the admiration and encouragement of Jonas Mekas, who is without question the cinema's foremost diarist. MacDonald has chosen a film Robertson made about her garden: *Melon Patches, Or Reasons to Go on Living* (1994). The film's subtitle has to do with Robertson's suffering from acute manic-depression. Robertson has had spells in mental hospitals—sometimes two or three times a year. Much of the time she declines to take the prescribed medication for her condition because she finds it inhibits her creativity. This heroic choice exposes her both to acute pain and to serious dangers: MacDonald suggests that her filmmaking and her gardening are pleasures and disciplines that help her master her condition.

Before she began working with a 16mm camera, Rose Lowder spent years with loops of 16mm film trying to determine whether the smallest unit of film structure was the single frame. She concluded that "pieces from different frames can make up what you're seeing on the screen." MacDonald characterizes that project as "a painstaking process of recording imagery a single frame at a time, refocusing from one focus point to another in a single framed space according to precisely organized 'scores.'" This approach resulted in a pair of films, each of which focuses on a different sort of garden. In *Rue des teinturies* (1979), she set her camera to look out of her house in Avignon at the street across the way. Over a period of months, she recorded this space. The focus point changes in virtually every frame—sometimes levels of the street are in focus and the leaves are a blur, sometimes the reverse. A later film *Les tournesols* (*The Sunflowers*) (1982), was photographed from a wide variety of focus points within the camera's field of vision. She condenses the subtle movement of sunflowers that occurred during hours into three minutes of cinematic time. MacDonald comments that in the ensuing years, Lowder's minimalism became more and more an attempt to explore condensing events that took place over a day into a single, limited duration of film. Whereas the early films often explore the deep space of a single composition, recent films explore time more fully than space. *Impromptu* (1989) was followed—in 1994 and 1995—by *Bouquets 1-10*. As before, every frame is different from the frames that precede and succeed it. MacDonald reproduces in color two very beautiful filmstrips from *Bouquet 9* and *Bouquet 10*. Each strip has three full frames and just a hint of the frames preceding and succeeding each strip—enough for the viewer to infer the design of a larger strip than the three full frames supply.

In Chapter Four, "Revisioning the American West," MacDonald enlists Wayne Franklin's book *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* to analyze and evaluate *The Sky on Location* (1983), by Babette Mangold, *North on Evers* (1991), by James Benning, *Natural Born Killers* (1994), by Oliver Stone, and *Roam Sweet Home* (1996), by Ellen Spiro. In the course of analyzing types of narratives written by Europeans in response to North America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, Franklin begins with the "discovery narrative"—astonishment at the immensity and beauty of the land—which he calls the simplest of narratives. In the "exploratory narrative," the writer longs to harness New World nature "to transform its details into human objects or artifacts." The explorer's narrative prose style is grammatically more complex than the prose of the discoverer. Finally, in the "settlement narrative," the writer is faced with the difficult facts of life that settlement in the now-explored territory has revealed, producing the most complex narrative of all.

Macdonald believes that these categories can fruitfully be applied to independent film and video work in the twen-

tieth century. Thus Mangold's film is a "rediscovery film" because, even in several trips by very different pathways, "she seems to be rediscovering the beauty and sublimity of the west." Benning's film MacDonald calls a "reexploratory" narrative. Benning overlays two different trips that emphasize visits to family and friends, while also addressing social problems. Calling it Resettlement Narrative (#1), MacDonald discusses the meanings he sees in Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Resettlement Narrative (#2) is *Roam Sweet Home* (1996). Traveling the Southwest from Texas to California, Spiro talks with dozens of older people and records their varying perspectives on the stage of life in which they now find themselves. More often than not, they are vigorously active in a wide array of pursuits, many of which, as the title indicates, entail directed or open-ended travel.

Chapter Five, "From the Sublime to the Vernacular," treats two films: *Twister* (1996), Jan DeBont's special effects blockbuster about tornadoes and other destructive weather, and George Kuchar's *Weather Diaries: Diary 1* (1986). The millions that *Twister* cost and the $11 that Kuchar spent for videotape (and the $60 a week for his motel) is no doubt the chapter's main contrast. On the other hand, the footage the viewer sees over *Twister*'s credits—which are shown at the end of the film—is a "poignant visual coda," as MacDonald calls it: "DeBont provides a montage of skyscape. . . . Compared with the frenetic action during the film, these shots provide . . . a calm after the storm." Indeed, MacDonald finds these "lovely but impressive images" reminiscent of the tradition of storm representation in nineteenth-century painting. *Weather Diary 1,* the film MacDonald finds the most compelling of the 12 weather diaries Kuchar made in subsequent years, is characteristic of Kuchar in its mixture of the climatic and intimate personal details.

Chapter Six, "The City as Motion Picture," is at 75 pages by far the longest chapter in the book. It treats 13 filmmakers and 16 films. Since "place" is fundamental to the plan of the book, it is worth noting that six of the makers operate in New York City and seven in California; the sixteen films are divided equally between them. Comprising the New York films are Rudy Burckhardt's New York Films (1946, 1948, 1953), *Weegie's New York* (1952), Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1957), Marie Menken's *Go! Go! Go!* (1962-1964), Hilary Harris's *Organism* (1975), and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989). The San Francisco films are Frank Stauffacher's *Sausalito* (1948) and *Notes on the Port of St. Francis* (1952), Bruce Baillie's *Castro Steet* (1966), Michael Rudnick's *Panorama* (1982), and Ernie Gehr's *Eureka* (1979) and *Side/Walk/Shuttle* (1991).

Having surveyed in detail all the New York-based filmmakers, MacDonald notes that "while the New York films are a good bit more impressive, the fact remains that San Francisco was clearly a city early movie viewers wanted to see. . . ." To say which grouping of films one considers "more impressive" than another grouping is not to pose a theoretical perspective or an analytical question. This chapter is not structured or informed by methods of reading or interpretation in the way that all the book's other chapters are. However, in regard to a chapter of 75 pages, a single theoretical perspective could hardly be designed to encompass the gargantuan dimensions involved. The sheer scope, the kaleidoscopic array of the filmmakers and films that has been summoned, makes such synthetic judgments virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, MacDonald's text readings are absorbing throughout; a brief look at his account of *Invisible Cities* (1990) by Eugene Martin is of considerable interest. Martin's home base is Philadelphia, which is the first of the ten cities explored in *Invisible Cities*; the others, in the order they appear in the film, are Las Vegas, Turin, Berlin, Venice, Verona, Paris, Rome, Caracas, and New York. MacDonald notes that while Las Vegas and Venice are unmistakable in other instances, in this film we are unsure which of these locations we're looking at. *Invisible Cities* has a narrator—Peter Finn—and a protagonist filmmaker (Eric Schoefer), who uses a hand-wound 1920s Bell & Howell camera as Martin did in making the film, but does not otherwise play or suggest Martin. Schoefer and Finn convey a preoccupation with the photographic work of Eugene Atget (1857-1927) who documented Old France and especially Old Paris, which was disappearing in his day as new technology and industrial development brought new populations, mainly from the country. Like Martin, Atget was attached to his out-of-date photographic equipment, which he used throughout his career. MacDonald notes that by shooting in reversal 16mm, and by using an antique camera, Martin gave *Invisible Cities* "a tonal quality evocative of nineteenth-century photography." He notes further that Martin "seems to see the city —modern or ancient—as characterized by collisions of old and new."

Chapter Eight is called "Rural (and Urban) Hours" and, indeed, Hollis Frampton, Robert Huot, Nathaniel Dorsky, and Peter Hutton all did bridge rural and urban experience in quite different and important ways at the most creative periods of their careers. MacDonald spends many informed and informing pages on this theme and the topic is an interesting one. But what the latter half of the chapter mainly concerns, I think, is the question of spirituality in the contemporary world. In many contexts at least, that issue cannot be broached directly or hit squarely; but in the work of Nathaniel Dorsky and Peter Hutton the issue is posed explicitly.

Nathaniel Dorsky's *Hours for Jerome* (1982) was made for his partner Jerome Hiler. Based on *The Book of Hours,* a prayer book for laypersons that went through many editions from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries, the film is organized as a series of interrelated prayers, and follows the format of a year's sequential organization. Dorsky is also explicitly concerned with spirituality in the contemporary world. He expresses this in his film, among other ways, as a meditative, alternative world that is slow and contemplative in contrast to the world outside the film, which is based in distraction. MacDonald provides a close reading of the film that elucidates its complex structure and rich texture. (The influence of Dorsky's work on MacDonald is evident in his finding cinema prayers in Brakhage's *Commingled Containers* [1997], Chick Strand's *Kristallnacht* [1979], and David Gaten's *What the Water Said*.)

Of the many filmmakers considered in the book, only Peter Hutton's work derives explicitly from nineteenth-century painting. For this reason, MacDonald calls his section on the filmmaker "Peter Hutton as Luminist." MacDonald argues that "during his thirty years as an independent filmmaker, Hutton has made a meditative gaze, especially a gaze on qualities of light and atmosphere, his fundamental rhetorical gesture. . . ." The Hutton films that MacDonald studies are *New York Portrait, Part I* (1976) and *Landscape (for Manon)* (1987). In the former, Hutton achieves quiet moments in New York City by carefully choosing perspectives and cinematically meditating on them in extended shots. This meditative sensibility is confirmed not only by Hutton's tendency to divide individual shots from one another by moments of darkness (as he does in *Landscape* as well), but also by his frequent use of fades in and out to introduce and conclude particular shots. *Landscape (for Manon)* and *In Titian's Goblet* (1991), which refers to Thomas Cole's painting *The Titian's Goblet* (1833), MacDonald says, "are Hutton's most obvious tributes to nineteenth-century painting."

Thomas Cole is discussed again, and far more extensively than before, in Chapter Nine, "Expulsion from the Garden." MacDonald devotes a superb, six-page formal and substantive analysis to Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828), reproduced in color. The long section that follows is called "Racism as the Fall." MacDonald begins this section with a list of written texts: *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1850); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dread, a Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856); and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp" (1865). Mention of these texts serves as background to MacDonald's discussion of several paintings by Thomas Moran that depict the swamp as a hideout for runaways. MacDonald notes that Moran's remarkable painting *Slave Hunt, Dismal Swamp, Virginia* (1862) dramatically suggests how slavery defies God's nature.

The first film that MacDonald considers in Chapter Nine is Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1992). He is especially interested in the way the film explores "the intersection of race and American nature." MacDonald comments that the island in the film is presented virtually as a new Eden. While the island is physically Edenic—Dash and cinematographer Arthur Jaffa emphasize its beauty—its loveliness is compromised by the island's racial history and by the continuation of this history in the film's present. Having covered Dash's film in little more than a page, MacDonald devotes nearly five pages to Carl Franklin's *One False Move* (1991). He notes that it provides "an implicit analysis of America's racial history that is unusually astute for a commercial feature." There are three main criminal characters and three police characters, with black and white characters in both triads. The film also develops an urban/rural opposition—the small-town sheriff from Star City, Arkansas, is joined by a pair of experienced Los Angeles detectives who investigated murders and money and drug theft in their city and who have reason to believe the criminals are heading to Star City to hide out.

"J.J. Murphy: Choosing to Fall" is the topic of Chapter Nine's final section. MacDonald observes that teachers of film history are aware that film is a material object that is subject to decay over time; it follows, of course, that some prints are better than others. Murphy put this to the test in an ingenious, 50-minute film called *Print Generation* (1974). Murphy made a one-minute diary of film he shot in rural Vermont at a friend's house and the rest at his mother's home in Bayonne, New Jersey. The images were organized into an "A" wind and a "B" wind. The film begins with the "A" wind, which begins with the most decayed image and proceeds very gradually to the most visible image. The procedure is reversed on the "B" wind, which proceeds from the most visible images and ends with the least visible image. MacDonald is not pleased that Murphy has chosen to give up his avant-garde career to make independent narratives. At the end of the day, however, MacDonald does take a serious look at Murphy's narrative films of the 1980s. The one film he admires, and discusses in a four-page essay, is *Horicon* (1993), which concerns Eva, who has discovered that her father is African-American.

In the logical organization of *The Garden in the Machine,* it is not only unsurprising but also perhaps inevitable that a chapter entitled "The Expulsion from the Garden" is followed by a chapter entitled "Satan's National Park." This chapter begins with a consideration of Bruce Conner's *Crossroads* (1976), a 36-minute film consisting of footage from the Crossroads nuclear test in the Pacific in the 1950s, superbly edited by Connor. "No filmmaker was more aware of the horrific beauty of the nuclear blast than Bruce Conner," notes MacDonald, who also details the wide influence that the film has had on other films, both independent and mainstream narrative films. MacDonald next takes up *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), Werner Herzog's 47-minute landscape film on the Gulf War.

MacDonald then extols the impact, concision, and excellence of "Alain Resnais' remarkable *Night and Fog* (1955)," followed by a consideration of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), which he regards as the only Holocaust film to have had a comparable impact to *Night and Fog*. MacDonald's title for the section, consistent with his emphasis in other sections, is "*Shoah* as Landscape Film." Noting at the outset the length of the film (nine hours, 23 minutes), MacDonald describes the film's two-part structure: the "First Era" focuses on the earlier months of extermination and the "Second Era" on the full-scale industrialization of death. One of the main trajectories of the film is the movement from rural, village, and small-town locations to an increasing focus on the huge death factory at Auschwitz and, finally, to urban Warsaw and what was the world's largest Jewish ghetto. MacDonald follows the four films discussed above with two late films by James Benning: *Deseret* (1995) and *Four Corners* (1997).

Chapter Eleven, "Benedictions/New Frontiers," is described in the introduction to *The Garden in the Machine* as "a discussion of films that offer some sense of recovery from the lost innocence explored in Chapters 9 and 10." The chapter begins with an explication of *Kristallnacht* (1979), a

seven-minute film by Chick Strand. The horrifying events in Germany and Austria of November 9th and 10th, 1938 are known by the word that serves as the title of Strand's film. But what the film chiefly shows is beautiful imagery of two young women swimming on a beautiful night that might be called crystalline. At the end of the film the dedication appears, "For Anne Frank." For MacDonald, Strand's film is a cine-prayer for Anne Frank and also a prayer for our present and future. . . . Strand's care in cutting the lovely imagery she uses honors both the memory of the past and the experience of the present—even as it defies the tendency of commercial media to either ignore or exploit both human suffering and healthy, innocent sensuality.

It is refreshing that in this text MacDonald represents the work of Stan Brakhage with two very short films: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981)—a two-and-a-half-minute film that collects seeds, tiny flowers, and blades of grass in a kind of collage sandwiched between two 35mm film strips—and *Commingled Containers* (1997). At a time when a serious health condition threatened his life, Brakhage spent several hours filming the "bubbleworld" under the surface of the water in Boulder Creek, Colorado. Of the result, MacDonald observes, "this imagery . . . is both very beautiful and suggestive of the spiritual dimension of human life that lies just under the surface of everyday experience."

MacDonald then addresses Leighton Pierce's most notable work to date: a 53-minute film called *50 Feet of String* (1995). The title refers to a rule Pierce imposed on himself—he would not film further than 100 yards from his kitchen. This rule has two functions: it imposes his immediate domestic realm as his camera's only visual field and it requires constant invention and imagination to produce not just footage but a film. The film combines sounds and images gathered from midsummer to fall and later arranges them into an intricate montage. The 50 feet of string is a literal and important presence in the film, what MacDonald calls "its most pervasive metaphor."

Finally, MacDonald turns to David Gattan, who had become interested in the idea of non-linear film. What avant-garde filmmakers claimed was non-linear film was both made and presented in a linear manner. Gatten took rolls of 16mm film and put the unspooled film into a crab trap, which he then submerged in the ocean on three separate occasions in 1997. He use three different film stocks: black-and-white print stock Optical Sound Film; Color Positive Stock; and Color Reversal Print Stock. These were submerged for short periods of different duration. He charted all these variations carefully, including storms and tides at the time of submerging. The results of these variations were a wide variety of colors, patterns, and sounds. MacDonald notes his belief that Gatten's throwing the crab cage into the sea is a kind of prayer, a spiritually driven gesture that comprises a petition to nature in the hope of a response.

MacDonald's essay on the work of David Gatten is entitled "Envoi: David Gatten." "Envoi" tells us that there will be no concluding chapter or section to the book. Therefore this section on Gatten, the final filmmaker to be considered in the final chapter of *The Garden in the Machine,* is literally the conclusion of the book. In honor of the occasion, MacDonald makes an eloquent statement of his faith in the present moment of filmmaking.

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> Who could have imagined that avant-garde cinema could continue throughout the 1980s and 1990s to produce new forms of film experience (and to reinvigorate earlier innovations) when, only a few years ago, even some of its more distinguished chroniclers were claiming that we'd seen the last of important work and that the entire field would soon disappear from view? A perfect example has been the recent work of David Gatten, one of a number of contemporary filmmakers who are finding new ways of working collaboratively with the natural environment and natural processes.

What MacDonald omits is his own indispensable role in the discovery and/or celebration of such striking and accomplished media makers as Anne Charlotte Robertson, Rose Lowder, Ellen Spiro, Eugene Martin, Nathaniel Dorsky, Peter Hutton, Leighton Pierce, and David Gatten. The reader does not question that these makers stand in actuality where they stand in MacDonald's book—alongside the classic makers he discusses there. No other critic or theorist has ever introduced anything like the work of this number of makers to so many readers. None is likely to do so—except MacDonald himself perhaps—for a generation.

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The Invention of the Western Film

A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century

By Scott Simmon. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003. $85.00 cloth; $30.00 paper.

Although it may be hard for contemporary moviegoers to fathom, for the first 70 years of movie history the Western was the most durable and persistently popular genre in the business. A thousand or more Westerns were made each

seven-minute film by Chick Strand. The horrifying events in Germany and Austria of November 9th and 10th, 1938 are known by the word that serves as the title of Strand's film. But what the film chiefly shows is beautiful imagery of two young women swimming on a beautiful night that might be called crystalline. At the end of the film the dedication appears, "For Anne Frank." For MacDonald, Strand's film is a cine-prayer for Anne Frank and also a prayer for our present and future. . . . Strand's care in cutting the lovely imagery she uses honors both the memory of the past and the experience of the present—even as it defies the tendency of commercial media to either ignore or exploit both human suffering and healthy, innocent sensuality.

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By Scott Simmon. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003. $85.00 cloth; $30.00 paper.

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decade from the 1920s to the 1940s, and around 800 in the 1950s, but television more than took up the slack: in 1959 *thirty* Western TV programs were showing on American networks; eight of them were among the top ten in the Nielsen ratings. This enormous number of Western films made through 1960 makes the topic an important one for film historians and critics to tackle—and writers like Fenin and Everson, Cawelti, Tuska, Tomkins, French, Buscombe, and Slotkin (among many others) have done so—but those sheer numbers are also daunting, forcing one to think carefully about approach and focus. Scott Simmon's new book—*The Invention of the Western Film*—offers an interesting new look at the Western from its origins to the decade following World War Two.

Simmon, a film scholar and preservationist, has previously written on Vidor and Griffith, and curated the outstanding *Treasures of the American Film Archives* DVD set, which included beautiful restorations of two Thomas Ince-produced Westerns: *The Invaders* (1912), which Simmon discusses in detail in Part One of his book, and William S. Hart's *Hell's Hinges* (1916). The book is subtitled *A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century,* and in the preface Simmon defines "cultural history" as "examining film aesthetics within a wide context of literature and visual arts, of social histories of the eras depicted and of the years when the films were produced, and of the ideologies propounded by the films" (xiv). One of the strengths of the book is Simmon's ability to link the films he discusses in perceptive ways to writings by authors like Cooper, Frances Parkman, and Wister; to painters like Cole, Remington, and Bierstadt; and to photographers like W.H. Jackson and Timothy O'Sullivan. Another is the depth and breadth of research: Simmon is interested in and familiar with the scholarly literature on both Western movies and the history of the West (including the work of the New Western historians who have reconceptualized Turner's influential frontier thesis of American history), and his assertions and references are well documented in 50 pages of small-type print. Finally, Simmon is adept at moving back and forth between the times in which the Western films are set and the times in which they were produced—a useful flexibility for a cultural historian of a genre that is set in the past.

Although the title made me worry that the book might be a list-heavy chronology, Simmon avoided the encyclopedic temptation by placing, as he puts it, "a limited number of films and filmmakers at the center of our investigations and, by spinning short connections to related films and figures," writing "a relatively full genre history within a reasonable length" (xiv).

The book's structure contains three parts and 26 chapters. Part One—"'My Friend, the Indian': Landscape and the Extermination of the Native American in the Silent Western"—contains the interesting distinction between the "Eastern Western" and the "Far Western." According to Simmon, between 1908 and around 1911, before film production became widespread in California, Westerns were often shot in heavily forested areas like upstate New York and often included placid lakes. These Westerns owed more to the Cooper Leatherstocking Tales and often developed individuated and sympathetic Native-American characters. The shift of film production to California, however, led to Simmon's "Far Western," in which the landscape was more empty and desert-like, the plots tended to revolve around the Plains Wars, and Native Americans were portrayed more as a group threat to social order than as individual characters. To demonstrate the differences between the two kinds of Westerns, Simmon discusses in greatest detail *The Invaders,* calling it a Plains War narrative that nevertheless "complicated its argument by retaining certain older and eastern patterns" (56).

Part Two—"'It's Time for Your History Lesson, Dear': John Wayne and the Problem of History in the Hollywood Western of the 1930s"—focuses especially on the fundamental differences between the relatively few A-Westerns made during the decade (about 50) and the thousand or more B-Westerns made in the same span. This section draws on Simmon's claim that among film genres, "the Western is far and away the most comfortable propounding ideas about American historical and political life," and that as the Western moved into the sound era, it voiced "its political and social contentions as clearly" as it ever would (103). In examining these Westerns, which were often epics affirming Manifest Destiny, Simmons emphasizes three sets of conflicts that often struggle with one another in the narratives: a Rousseauian view of nature as divine and healing versus a Darwinian view of nature as a site of struggle for survival; a "soft" or deist religious tradition of human perfectability versus the "hard" Puritan tradition of innate depravity; and a Jeffersonian small-scale agrarian participatory democracy versus a Jacksonian common-man individualism. This part pays special attention to *The Big Trail* (a 1930 A-Western starring John Wayne), a wide variety of B-Westerns, and concluding with a brief and insightful discussion of *Stagecoach,* which helped the Western return to the A-stage in 1939.

Simmon's Part Three, titled "'That Sleep of Death': John Ford and the Darkness of the Classic Western in the 1940s," examines the ways in which Westerns right after World War Two were inflected by film noir, paying particular attention to John Ford's 1946 retelling of the Gunfight at the OK Corral, *My Darling Clementine*. Noting that Westerns have often portrayed the landscape as empty, Simmon argues that "by the films of the 1940s, emptiness seems to seep into the characters themselves, who play out bitter conflicts on landscapes wiped clean for their testing" (194). *Clementine* is the most stylistically accomplished and complex of the three core films Simmon emphasizes in the book, and Simmon demonstrates his skills as an insightful close reader by examining closely four scenes in Chapters 20-24. Thereafter he broadens out to examine a number of other noir-inflected Westerns in one chapter and to consider a number of cinematic reworkings of the Wyatt Earp story right up to *Tombstone* and *Wyatt Earp* in the 1990s. Much of this last third of the book focuses on the various ways that Westerns in the decade after World War Two struggle to overcome the anxieties of the noir vision to create a sense of family or community satisfaction.

Clearly written, *The Invention of the Western Film* is also well illustrated, sometimes with production stills but more often (and more usefully) with frame enlargements that support the visual analysis. Good historians of film are often less confident as visual analysts, and vice versa. Yet one of Simmon's strengths is his ability to do perceptive close visual readings of movies while also making skillful and sometimes exciting connections between the film under study and other films, other works of literary or visual art, and the history of the West. This combination of talents, along with such fresh insights as how the shift from the "Eastern Western" to the "Far Western" helped precipitate the near vanishing of Native Americans from Westerns in the decade of the 1910s, make this study a most welcome addition to the shelf of books on the cultural significance of American film genres.

Chuck Maland teaches Cinema Studies and American Studies in the English Department at the University of Tennessee and is the author, among others, of *Chaplin and American Culture.*

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John Ford's *Stagecoach*

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One would think that everything that could possibly be written *has* been written about John Ford's 1939 classic Western. But one would be wrong. Barry Keith Grant's excellent collection of new articles by an all-star line-up of contributors examines both neglected aspects of the film's meanings and production history, as well as *Stagecoach*'s more familiar features, in enlightening, unprecedented detail and from fresh perspectives. While the writers must acknowledge and incorporate oft-repeated critical chestnuts about the film, this book is an informative, highly enjoyable read which makes one eager to watch the film (yet) again.

Grant's own introduction succinctly makes the case for the film's importance in film history—its profound and broad influence on filmmakers to this day (from its use of majestic Monument Valley and John Wayne to Yakima Canutt's frequent horseriding stunts, for example). But Grant also provides new insights on the film, as when he speaks of its mixing of different genres (the road movie, the melodrama, the disaster film) and its structural niceties (the various contrasts among the characters) and the sense of fate (and Manifest Destiny) which pervades its narrative. Rather than accept criticism of the film's Western conventions (such as the saloon piano player who stops when bad news arrives for Luke Plummer), Grant stresses the film's self-conscious elements and the ways in which Ford fills out the clichés with striking details (as with Hatfield's silver cup from Greenfield Manor).

One scholarly cliché holds that *Stagecoach* reintroduced the Western into major studio A-production, but in his article Thomas Schatz corrects and refines this point by providing an invaluable examination of the industrial and generic contexts in which the film was produced. In fact, the majors had their own in-house productions already in the works when *Stagecoach* appeared, inspired not by the thriving B-Westerns of the 1930s, but by the industry's late-1930s penchant for a variety of historical costume pictures—from swashbucklers to Technicolor spectacles and "outdoor" films (such as Ford's own *Drums Along the Mohawk*). This, and not studio executive lack of imagination, is why Ford had difficulty finding a backer for *Stagecoach* until Walter Wanger agreed. Schatz also offers many kinds of insights into the film itself, from underlining (like Rudy Behlmer) the script's debt to Bret Harte's *The Outcasts of Poker Flats,* to commenting on the impact of Wayne's "minimalist" performance, and revising our sense of *Stagecoach*'s place in the various kinds of Westerns then prevalent. Even if other late 1930s Westerns earned higher box office grosses, Ford's was the superior film.

Schatz also shows that Ford enjoyed extraordinary freedom in making *Stagecoach,* and certainly screenwriter Dudley Nichols gave Ford all the credit for the film's success. But in his contribution to this volume Charles Maland suggests that Nichols collaborated with Ford to shape the film in terms of his own Popular Front activism, the international liberal-radical anti-fascist fight that also depicted businessmen as the enemies of the common man. Since while writing *Stagecoach* Nichols played a significant role in both Hollywood anti-fascist groups and in the Screen Writers Guild's arduous negotiations for recognition and bargaining power with the major studios, Nichols' politics must have influenced his writing. Its traces can be found in Nichols' two major additions to Ernest Haycox's short story, the diametrically opposed selfish, corrupt "economic royalist" banker Gatewood and the community-minded, paternal, matchmaking, French Revolution-quoting, "kind professional" Doctor Boone. And as Maland is careful to point out, while Ford enlivened these characters in his direction of Berton Churchill and Thomas Mitchell, he was not the unabashed liberal that Nichols was. Maland makes an airtight case for Nichols' contributions (though I wish editing had caught the miscrediting of Gregg Toland for Bert Glennon's splendid cinematography).

Leland Poague offers the volume's one foray into reception studies, examining how Ford's three 1939 films (*Stagecoach, Young Mr. Lincoln,* and *Drums Along the Mohawk*) were advertised and reviewed in several locales. In doing so, Poague insightfully notes the many connections among the films' depiction of pioneer life, death and celebration, and flag raising. He considers their implications in general and at specific moments for contemporary American audiences (as with the close-up of the slave Daisy watching the flag raising at the end of *Drums*) and speculates on how these connections, allusions, and even Ford's name, would have registered with 1939 movie audiences. Poague also describes in some detail the advertisements for the three films (though the book lacks reproductions of the ads for the films besides *Stagecoach*), noting the ways in which United Artists downplayed the film's Western categorization but em-

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J.P. Telotte's intriguing "'A Little Bit Savage': *Stagecoach* and Racial Representation" argues that Ford's film renders with a critical eye the white characters' fears, judgements, and misjudgements of Native Americans. From Mr. Peacock's hysteria over Chris's "savage" wife at Apache Wells to Hatfield's near mercy-killing of Lucy during the Apache attack (a convention of captivity narratives that also informs Little Sister's fatal leap away from Gus in *The Birth of a Nation*), these scenes reveal (following Richard Slotkin's general research) that the white characters maintain overwhelmingly powerful fantasies and fears of the Native Americans and of their possible merging with the frontier environment. Telotte's brief contrast between the *Stagecoach* Apache attack and a comparable scene in DeMille's *Union Pacific* only points to the more open, questioning tenor of Ford's rendering of such attitudes (all of DeMille's protagonists believe in the necessity of the woman's mercy killing, whereas only the southerner Hatfield explicitly does in Ford's film). When we recall that these snap misjudgements of Native Americans are linked to the various, culturally conditioned misperceptions the haughty stagecoach passengers make about others, we can discern Ford's critical view of them, which, as Telotte reminds us, became more pronounced in Ford's later Westerns.

Taking a cue from Richard Slotkin's brief analysis of *Stagecoach*'s depiction of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, Gaylyn Studlar's essay examines in unprecedented detail the film's construction of gender, region, class, and frontier democracy. Since Tonto is both the most "civilized" and most intolerant community in the film, *Stagecoach* demonstrates the contradictions riddling the popular notion that the frontier fulfilled a "class-leveling function" as a democratic locale that allowed every citizen to make a fresh start. Studlar's analysis illuminates such heretofore neglected aspects of the film as the highly charged significance of Lucy and Hatfield's aristocratic origins in the planter class of the old South; the Ringo Kid's firm linkage to the Western community (as opposed to the solitary hero of Western convention); and the ways in which Ford's staging, framing and editing of the Apache attack show Dallas to be the best-suited woman for motherhood in the film. Where the secondary characters comically embody "frontier illiteracy, coarseness, grotesque physicality, and multicultural, interethnic sexual mixing," Ringo and Dallas remain aristocrats of the spirit, endowed with a folk nobility. Making explicit what the film has left casually implicit, Studlar definitively places *Stagecoach* within various popular and scholarly conceptions of Western history, and briefly notes its significance to post-Depression America.

Of all the essays, William Rothman's close reading of *Stagecoach*'s staging, framing, and editing most persistently builds upon previous analyses of the film. Like previous critics, Rothman notes that the characters in *Stagecoach*—particularly the Ringo Kid and Dallas, but even the comic Buck—have depths of feeling and imagination that Ford's pacing and editing often seem to undercut (as when Ringo watches Dallas walk down the hall at Apache Wells after Coyote's birth). Rothman eventually focuses on three crucial encounters between Dallas and Lucy: their initial exchange of looks in Tonto, their farewell in Lordsburg where they acknowledge their utter separation, and the much analyzed interplay of looks at the Dry Forks Station dining table, where Rothman finds Lucy less judgmental than previous critics (such as Nick Browne and Tag Gallagher) have asserted. Rothman attributes this logic of the text to what Gallagher has called Ford's "melodramatized representation of inner experience," a quality of the female characters which precludes their genuinely changing and forming a friendship (one aim of the essay seems to be to elevate Gallagher's critical analyses of the film above all others). As with all of Rothman's writing, close analysis provides careful insights into *Stagecoach's* textual complexity.

Rounded out with three contemporaneous reviews of the film, a complete Ford filmography, and a selected bibliography, *John Ford's Stagecoach* is must reading for any student of the Western, of Ford, and of *Stagecoach* itself, for both the multiplicity of approaches the contributors employ and for the riches of their analyses.

Matthew Bernstein co-edited *John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era,* (2001) and is Book Review Editor for *Film Quarterly*.

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Orson Welles

The Stories of His Life

By Peter Conrad. London: Faber and Faber, 2003. $25.00 cloth; $15.00 paper.

In the introduction to *Orson Welles: The Stories of His Life,* Peter Conrad emphasizes that he is not writing a biography. He nevertheless employs a relentlessly biographical form of criticism, treating nearly everything Welles did, from directing *Citizen Kane* to narrating a tacky documentary about Nostradamus, as a straightforward expression of the artist's personality. According to Conrad, all the characters Welles played or directed on the stage and screen—including Faustus, Don Quixote, Falstaff, Macbeth, Kurtz, Charles Foster Kane, and Harry Lime—were "extensions of himself." The chapters of Conrad's book are organized in terms of these and other "stories" that supposedly made up Welles's contradictory identity, and the book as a whole tends to oscillate between two views of the man: "a tragic hero, struck down by hubris," and "a comic character, enfeebled by petty weaknesses."

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Conrad's method can of course be traced to the Romantic movement, which took seriously Samuel Taylor Coleridge's insistence upon an absolute identity between the

poem and the poet, and which often applied biographical interpretation to the study of the nineteenth century's favorite author, William Shakespeare. By the beginning of the twentieth century, biographical criticism had been practiced so often and so badly that it was ripe for satire—as in the "library" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* where Stephen Dedalus outlines a delirious, proto-Freudian biography of the Bard purely on the basis of internal evidence from the plays and verse. The New Criticism succeeded in temporarily demolishing such practices, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century, at a time when celebrity biographies are more popular than ever, critical attempts to read the artist through the work appear to be resurfacing.

Orson Welles is a logical subject for this sort of analysis. One of the last Romantics, he deliberately salted his films and theatrical productions with autobiographical references and developed a distinctive cinematic style that bears the mark of his larger-than-life personality. Even when he acted in other people's movies, he had a tendency to peek through his masks. He also gave countless interviews and wrote scores of journalistic essays expressing his opinions about art and politics. Conrad's approach is therefore in many ways legitimate, enabling him to show a certain degree of intellectual and psychological unity in the midst of the complexity and fragmentation of Welles's prodigious career. Unfortunately, his argument is sometimes pushed too far, to the point where, like the most vulgar forms of Romantic criticism, it becomes exasperating.

Before discussing the book's shortcomings, let me first emphasize its virtues. It skillfully weaves together Welles's work in different media, giving equal emphasis to his accomplishments as director, writer, and actor. It exhibits a dazzling erudition, drawing on sources as distant and diverse as Pico Della Mirandola and Wyndham Lewis to elucidate Welles's ideas. It offers the best account I've read of the cultural implications of "baroque" style in Welles's films, and an extremely good explanation of how Welles differs ideologically from John Ford, who was one of his cultural heroes. It provides a subtle and convincing discussion of the reasons behind Welles's life-long fascination with bullfighting, and an intriguing commentary on Welles's ambivalent attitude toward modernity.

More importantly, it contains brilliant passages of textual analysis. Conrad tells us rather little about the technical aspect of Welles's individual films or about the conditions of their production, but he superbly evokes their texture and feel, and he makes strikingly original observations about their patterns of imagery. His pages on fire and ice in *Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* can be ranked among the best things ever written about those much-discussed films. He has equally fine things to say about the Shakespeare adaptations, about Welles's importance as a Shakespearian actor, and about such underrated pictures as *Journey into Fear* and *The Stranger*. In most cases he accomplishes what only the best critics manage to do: he quickens our desire to see the work again, and to appreciate subtle details we've overlooked.

The chief problems with Conrad's book have to do with its facile equations between Welles and the characters he played, and its promulgation of familiar, highly questionable, myths about the man. The chapter entitled "Faust" is a prime example. I must confess that in my own book on Welles I've made a somewhat similar argument, pointing out that Welles identified with Faust and that his personality, as expressed through his style, had both a progressive and a reactionary aspect. I've also argued that there is something Faustian and even Kurtz-like about Welles's transformation of *Macbeth* into a story of the battle between "dark gods" and "Christian law and order." But even granting this, plus the fact that Welles often played Faustian characters and was publicly associated with them (see Minnelli's *The Band Wagon,* in which a distinctly Wellesian director tries to stage a musical version of Faust), was Welles, as Conrad wants us to believe, actually like the tragic hero of Christopher Marlowe's drama? I think not, except perhaps in the general sense that anybody who signs a Hollywood contract can be said to have entered into a Faustian bargain. It is certainly true that for most Americans Welles began as a spectacular talent and ended up as a fat man who sold cheap wine on TV, and that many commentators give his career the rise-and-fall structure of a Faustian morality play.

The truth, however, is more complicated. Welles had a longer and more sustained life as a movie director than Preston Sturges, who in 1941 was one of the most successful and admired people in Hollywood. In later years Welles may have seemed a kitschier figure than John Houseman and Laurence Olivier, who performed "tasteful" ads for an investment company and the Polaroid Corporation, but who is to say that his soul was more tarnished than theirs? Again and again Welles made films that criticized the Faustian type, and if he compared himself to such a character, it was only by way of acknowledging a temptation he wanted to avoid. Contrary to what Conrad suggests, Welles was never attracted to the occult, and the magical effects of his films and stage shows were always intended to be recognized as tricks. Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* seems to me closer to the truth when it argues that Welles, like Walter Benjamin, saw that the Nazis were "aestheticizing politics," and made a calculated attempt to turn their magic against them.

Despite his notorious trickery and charm, Welles was also no Harry Lime. Conrad says that "Welles played the role [in *The Third Man*] without makeup, as if confessionally." What then did it mean when he used heavy makeup to play Faust, Kane, Arkadin, Falstaff, and Clay? By the same token, we should not confuse Welles with Kurtz, the antihero of *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad believes, on very little evidence, that a "shadowed side" of Welles's personality concealed "a superman, who . . . looks down in contempt on his brutish inferiors, and orders their extermination." He claims that when Welles went to Brazil to film *It's All True,* he "found a society whose riotous carnival enabled him to cast off the puritanical, businesslike rigour of the United States," and that he went native, "misbehaving" and "frittering away the budget for another unfinished film." But Welles didn't

need the Brazilians to teach him how to party. The record shows that he made a serious and important film, much of which was destroyed by the studio, and that he underwent major sacrifices in order to keep shooting documentary footage after RKO had withdrawn its support.

Although Conrad says many insightful things about *Citizen Kane,* he is more interested in the resemblance between Kane and Welles than in the much greater resemblance between Kane and William Randolph Hearst. Repeatedly, and in spite of his manifest respect for Welles's work, Conrad describes the man as a sinister, egocentric, and dissolute "genius" who was "ruined by megalomania and self indulgence." Because Welles at one time wanted to make a simple, austere, anti-DeMille film about the life of Christ, and because he played Cagliostro in the movies, Conrad suggests that he must have identified with Christ. (This same insinuation can be found in a problematic documentary, *The Battle over Citizen Kane,* which is included as an extra on the Warner DVD edition of *Kane*.) Like several previous commentators, Conrad thinks that Welles wanted to hog all the credit for *Kane*; and, somewhat like Charles Higham, he argues that Welles's later films were unfinished because the director had a psychological need to "postpone" completion. Throughout, he portrays Welles less as a *bon vivant* than as a "spendthrift and playboy." Meanwhile, he says very little about how Welles's work was affected by the Hollywood studios, by the increasingly conservative political atmosphere of the Cold War, and by the difficulties of making independent films in an era before the development of a widespread distribution network for European art cinema. He says even less about the sheer physical stress of directing low-budget movies as one grows old.

Everywhere Conrad's study is enlivened by striking *aperçus,* but it also contains a number of factual errors and inaccuracies. In the introduction, he tells us that Welles once planned to make films of both Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. It's impossible to know where he obtained this information (his book contains no footnotes, no bibliography, and no acknowledgement of help with research), but I feel sure he is wrong. Welles planned only to make a film based on the *Odyssey,* a project that left his hands and eventually became *Ulysses* (1954), directed by Mario Camerini and starring Kirk Douglas. Here are a few similar slips: Welles didn't write the speech about "black dots" that Harry Lime delivers at the top of the Ferris wheel in *The Third Man*; Max Buda, the character Welles plays in *The V.I.P.s,* is not based on Welles but on the producer Alexander Korda; the government guards who locked *The Cradle Will Rock* out of the theater weren't merely "policing budget cuts"; there is no such thing as "voodoo" in Brazil, and, contrary to what Welles himself claimed, no "witch doctors" either; the *Manifesto Antropófago* by Oswald de Andrade (whose name is misspelled) is about something far more important than "the cannibal instinct" and "a love feast"; the *Kane* newsreel doesn't contain "documentary footage of Stalin"; and the term "mixed party" in *Touch of Evil* doesn't refer to a wild party involving "mixed drink and drugs" (it's an old Southern expression meaning a party where different races mingle). To these can be added a few moments when Conrad's interpretation of films becomes far-fetched—for example, when he tells us that the various swamp animals encountered by the Bannister party in *The Lady from Shanghai* are "Elsa's familiars," and when he describes the blind woman in *Touch of Evil* as a "white witch, shaming [Vargas] by her innocence."

Such lapses are a relatively minor concern in a book so rich in critical insight and so filled with useful speculation about Welles's ideas and intellectual influences. To his credit, Conrad is warmly affectionate when he deals with the Falstaffian and Quixotic aspects of Welles's persona, and he uses Welles's own commentaries on these characters to excellent effect. The book ends with a chapter on Welles as Prospero (a character he never played), containing an engrossing discussion of *F for Fake,* an interesting analysis of Welles as narrator of movies, and an appropriately touching emphasis on the elegiac moods of Welles's work. *Orson Welles: The Stories of His Life* has disappointing qualities, but is ultimately an important contribution to the critical literature on film history's most sacred beast.

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In *White,* cultural critic Richard Dyer famously called for "making whiteness strange." As part of the burgeoning field of critical whiteness studies, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's *Performing Whiteness* examines a broad range of films in order to further destabilize assumptions behind whiteness as a cultural norm. Along with an increasing number of scholars from diverse fields, she argues that whiteness (and all race formations) are ideologically and culturally constructed mythologies that do not exist on a biological or genetic level. Foster extensively cites key prior work on whiteness, history, and culture by scholars such as Dyer, Ruth Frankenberg, Theodore Allen, bell hooks, George Lipsitz, Toni Morrison, Peggy McIntosh, and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks. Her book explores how the racist political and social power of "whiteness" has pervaded and virtually defined American cinema from its late-nineteenth century origins to today's increasingly globalized digital culture. Where she most clearly breaks new critical ground and transcends previous studies of whiteness in American cinema (for example, the Daniel Bernardi-edited anthologies *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S Cinema* and *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*) is through her compelling thesis that whiteness itself is a performance. Bernardi once earlier observed that "there are no white people per se; only those

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who pass as white." Foster has taken that axiom and built an entire book around it.

In her introductory chapter, she clarifies her strategy of using "postmodern pastiche" as a means of more effectively exposing and dismantling "master narratives" of whiteness. Her high-octane mixture of Butlerian performance theory and postmodernist deconstruction (inspired by Lyotard, Jameson, and Baudrillard) allows her to dismantle cinematic whiteness with a range of weapons. The restless scope of *Performing Whiteness* includes dozens of film and television texts produced over the last century. Chapter Six, for example, looks at ways that race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality all filter through "Performing the 'Bad' White." The analyses here include everything from Hollywood fallen-woman melodramas like *Stella Dallas* to reality television shows like *The Weakest Link* to Freudian film noir like *White Heat* to racist stereotypes in the *Star Wars* films and Hardy Boys mystery books series (and that's only a small partial survey of the chapter's contents).

If this sounds like cultural criticism as a form of academic channel surfing, the constant shifts and jarring juxtapositions of different time periods, genres, and media all seem precisely the point. Foster impressionistically demonstrates just how pervasive (and often inherently unstable) seemingly normative and invisible constructions of white privilege and identity in American culture have been and remain. She organizes her material around thematized chapter divisions such as "Inventing Whiteness," "White Face, White Space," "Performing the 'Good' White," "Performing White Otherness," etc. Perhaps the richest (and most cohesive) chapter overall is the fourth one—"The Bad-White Body." In this section, Foster interprets mutant white bodies (in films such as *The Amazing Colossal Man, Attack of the 50-Foot Woman, The Incredible Shrinking Man, The Cosmic Man*) and renegade body parts (*The Brain That Wouldn't Die, The Hands of Orlac, The Thing With Two Heads,* et al.) as allegories for the deceptions and failures of "white science." In other words, she argues that in their angst-ridden deconstructions/reconstructions of impossible bodies, these horror and science-fiction features keep exposing the desperate racial fictiveness of whiteness itself. Among her earlier works, Foster has authored *Captive Bodies: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Cinema* (SUNY Press, 1999), and many of the most penetrating textual readings in *Performing Whiteness* are through a postcolonial lens. Particular illuminating are her insights into *King Kong* (1933), *Tarzan* movies, the *Planet of the Apes* series, *The Mummy Returns* (2001), and the 1932 Bela Lugosi cult classic, *White Zombie*.

Yet the rapid-fire eclecticism of *Performing Whiteness* is arguably both its greatest strength and its chief weakness, especially in a comparatively compact volume of 180 pages. At some moments, the "postmodernist pastiche" strategy feels too rushed and scattershot. The often sharp cultural criticism occasionally alternates with mere inventory lists of thematically linked films. This generally energetic book ultimately loses steam in its concluding (seventh) chapter: "Performing White Otherness." Beyond an impressive, in-depth reading of Bassek Ba Kobhio's 1994 postcolonial documentary, *The "Great White" of Lambaréné* (on Albert Schweitzer in Africa), the rest of the chapter goes little further than giving a few hurried glances at images of emblematic Hollywood "white others"—Jeff Chandler in Native-American drag in *Broken Arrow,* Boris Karloff as Fu Manchu, Sidney Toler as Charlie Chan, "tribal extras" in Abbott and Costello's *Pardon My Sarong,* Puerto Rican character actor Luis Guzmán, et al. Much fuller explorations of the practices and politics of white otherness, racial masquerade, and white/off-white ethnicity in American cinema may be found in the respective writings of Gina Marchetti, Michael Rogin, Diane Negra, Joanne Hershfield, and Chris Holmlund, to name a few. Meanwhile, Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon's recent *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) expertly mines a good deal of the same thematic territory as *Performing Whiteness* while applying a more rigorous set of historiographic and sociological methodologies to a more delineated and finite body of film texts. Despite a few minor shortcomings, however, the Foster volume is a thought-provoking and theoretically engaging overview of whiteness in moving-image culture. The author's "postmodernist re/constructions" consistently show how cinematic whiteness gets embodied, spatialized, and racialized almost everywhere—from Alice Guy Blaché's *Making an American Citizen* (1912) to *The Philadelphia Story,* from *Gold Diggers of 1933* to *Holiday Inn,* from *The Brain from Planet Arous* to *The Matrix,* ad infinitum. The book manages to denaturalize white performativity and thus make more visible its enormous ideological power and omnipresence in American cinema and media.

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Screen Couple Chemistry

The Power of 2

By Martha P. Nochimson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper.

"Chemistry," as the term is applied to romantic screen partnerships, is both difficult to define—or to manufacture—and crucial to the success of screen romance. Most reviews and discussions of film romances point to the chemistry—or lack of it—between the two leads as a determining factor in whether the romance "works" or not. In a recent article in *The Guardian,* Molly Haskell describes chemistry as "the great sprinkling of fairy dust over a plausibly assumed 'ordinariness' with which we identify." The Hollywood romantic couple has been the subject of a number of full-length studies, including Stanley Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness,* Virginia Wright Wexman's *Creating the Couple,* and, more

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recently, Kay Young's *Ordinary Pleasures*. Martha P. Nochimson's S*creen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2,* however, is one of the first book-length attempts to examine the signifying power of this "sprinkling of fairy dust." Nochimson suggests that the chemistry between two (romantic) leads is a disruptive energy that can work against the often conventional stories and artificial environments of Hollywood filmmaking to open new ideas about gender and intimacy. When the star chemistry is particularly potent, she argues, it "[gives] the audience a way to stand at a distance from the more repressive aspects of society and to think about themselves and their desires in a new way" (10). This is a huge claim, and it raises several questions—not the least of which is what meanings these images actually construct for their viewers, and how.

Nochimson uses the films of Hollywood screen duos Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan, Myrna Loy and William Powell, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy to present her notion of the "Synergistic Couple." For Nochimson, this Synergistic Couple is an acting pair who, through the energy of their chemistry, are "bigger than the films they [make] together, the beauty of their several rapports seeming to break free from the constraints of any particular story, the relationship itself becoming a freestanding energy vortex" (4). The couples in her study act out this relationship over a series of films, creating "a widely accessible, extended and sometimes surprisingly cogent meditation on the relationship between the couple bond and social pressures" (6).

As a way of illustrating its potency, Nochimson constructs the Synergistic Couple against three other couple types. The Iconic Couple is a studio duo that still displays extraordinary chemistry, but rather than exuding the disruptive energy of the Synergistic Couple, they ultimately reinforce traditional ideals. The Iconic Couple is perhaps best exemplified in what Nochimson terms the "Gable Plus One" formula (11), Hollywood's practice of pairing a strong, iconic lead (like Gable) with a lesser co-star in films that "use their star power to [energize] a formulaic script and [make] cultural stereotypes seem like a party" (10). Less interesting and disruptive than the Synergistic and Iconic couples in interest and progressive potential is the flat, formulaic Functional Couple, "which fulfills only the minimum economic and narrative functions" (7).

While the bulk of the book focuses on products of the classical Hollywood studio system, Nochimson does discuss post-studio Synergistic Couples. This chapter includes a section on the collaboration of Woody Allen and Diane Keaton and Nochimson also focuses on two television couples, *The X-Files*'s Scully and Mulder (Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny) and *General Hospital*'s Luke and Laura (Tony Geary and Genie Francis). The move of the Synergistic Couple from film to television, according to Nochimson, is primarily a result of the changes in the film industry since the heyday of the studio system. No longer contractually bound to one studio or forced to work with the same collaborators over and over, contemporary actors are free to choose their own projects and rarely want to become known as part of a duo. Series television, on the other hand, offers the opportunities for the kind of extended, repeated interaction on which the Synergistic Couple depends. Nochimson provides eloquent descriptions of the chemistry between Anderson and Duchovny and Geary and Francis, including a moving first-hand account of Geary and Francis rehearsing and taping a particularly poignant scene.

Nochimson concludes her study with an examination of what she calls the Thematic Couple, a product of post-studio creative freedom that "break[s] into new representations that could not have existed at all in Old Hollywood" but still "preserve[s] the dominance of cultural codes" (285). As examples of the Thematic Couple, Nochimson offers Bill Cosby and Phylicia Rashad as the *The Cosby Show*'s upper-middle-class African-American Cliff and Claire Huxtable, the gender-questioning (and ultimately reaffirming) interplay of David Addison (Bruce Willis) and Maddie Hayes (Cybill Shepherd) of *Moonlighting,* and the onscreen collaborations of real-life married couple Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward (particularly their performances in *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*).

While critics such as Cavell and Young foreground the role of verbal play and "conversation" in the romantic duo, Nochimson focuses on the relation of the stars' images to the ideology of the film narrative. Nochimson claims that the "raw documentary elements in the [couple's] image" can create "not only fascination but also the potential for spectators to receive impressions that go beyond socially devised languages and systems" (13). The power of the couple's image, she adds, is especially significant under the constraints of the classical Hollywood system. The films produced under this system, she argues, "heighten the impact of star chemistry by the extreme tension created between that raw energy and the multitude of artificial technologies used by Hollywood" (19). She adds that "the combined energies of a star couple [appear] even more powerfully because of [their] inevitable resistance to [this] artificiality" (19). The generative potential of the tension between classical Hollywood's artificiality and patriarchal ideology and the raw energy of the Synergistic Couple informs Nochimson's readings of the couples and texts under consideration.

Nochimson's argument is intriguing, and the couples she uses to illustrate her points do, for the most part, exhibit the kind of chemistry on which she bases her thesis. But the meanings created by this chemistry, in my mind, are still open to question. I wholeheartedly agree, for example, that the first meeting between Hepburn and Tracy in *Woman of the Year* is "one of the great onscreen first-couple encounters in cinematic history," and I can attest to the thrill of imagining that one is watching, not just the characters, but Hepburn and Tracy themselves, falling in love right there on the screen. I would argue, however, that Hepburn's personal energy is almost always subdued by what Nochimson calls Tracy's "stolid bourgeois patriarchal energy" and the conservative machinations of the script (14). Nochimson claims that Hepburn's comically inept attempt to prepare Tracy's breakfast at the end of *Woman,* a scene meant to punish Hepburn for her feminine assertiveness, is rendered "visually inappropriate" in light of the chemistry and ostensible equality

displayed between the two throughout the rest of the film (195). We must remember, however, that the final image of the film is one of Hepburn/Tess collapsing in Tracy/Sam's arms, grateful that *he* has made the decision that will help her become a "real woman." This image infuses not only Hepburn and Tracy's onscreen partnership, but, if biographical accounts are accurate, their real-life relationship as well. While the sexual chemistry between Hepburn and Tracy is undeniable—and immensely enjoyable—I would suggest that Hepburn displays the kind of disruptive energy Nochimson seeks to define in pairings with Cary Grant, such as *Bringing up Baby, Holiday,* and *The Philadelphia Story* (the last two are rather unfairly dismissed by Nochimson as unexciting). In these films the Hepburn/Grant chemistry and their physicality enhance each star's disruptive energy, rather than submitting one to the control of the other.

The moments Nochimson describes are indeed powerful, and perhaps offer a glimpse at some sort of potential subversion. But while cases of extraordinary chemistry are indeed serendipitous, the fact is that such pairings are repeated in order to capitalize on the success of preceding films. Even the most alluring Synergistic Couple is subject to being commodified—and eventually drained of all its disruptive energy—by a powerful institution like the Hollywood studio system. The layout of Nochimson's main chapters speaks to this problem. She ends her chapters on each couple with discussions of their less successful films, films in which the power of the image is subordinated to the clichés and conservative ideology of the text. In each of these cases, it is the later films, those produced after the collaborations had been run through the Hollywood machine multiple times, that Nochimson sees as the least disruptive. Perhaps Nochimson's study would have been better served by including a more detailed examination of one of the one-time couples she mentions in her introduction, particularly Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca* or Leigh and Gable as *Gone with the Wind's* Rhett and Scarlett. Both of these pairings, as Nochimson mentions, possess the kind of raw energy and have the cultural status she sees in her Synergistic Couples. In fact, I would argue that their legacy is as great—if not greater—than some of the Synergistic Couples in this book. Further, as one-time events, they are arguably more spontaneous (if that word can be used about a studio product) and free of the Taylorized Hollywood process than the serialized, systematized parings discussed in the main chapters. The lasting impact of these couples, despite only existing in one text each, leads me to wonder if the couples Nochimson examines would have had the same impact in only one film. Would Weissmuller and O'Sullivan be as "iconic"—to depart from Nochimson's use of the word—as they are if they had only made one Tarzan film? Would Powell and Loy be so firmly cemented in the popular consciousness as a great screen pair with only one Thin Man installment between them?

One must ask, additionally, whether physical chemistry or raw star image can actually create a subversive meaning independent of the (often constrictive) text, or whether it simply provides moments of visceral thrill that may, in fact, help draw the spectator into a text's ideology. The power of *General Hospital*'s Geary and Francis is evident, not only in the record-setting ratings of their television wedding and numerous citations of "Luke and Laura" as one of daytime's greatest couples, but also in the undeniable, irreducible magic of their performances together—particularly in their first run as a couple in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The intensity of Geary and Francis's chemistry as Luke and Laura is so strong, however, that it led many fans and the show's creative personnel (and even, as she admits, Nochimson herself) to spend nearly two decades attempting to ignore one of the ugliest aspects of their story. Early in their relationship, Luke attacks Laura in what Nochimson describes as "a torturous, deglamorized rape scene" (277). Once Luke and Laura took off as a "supercouple," however, the rape was rewritten as an intense, if somewhat violent, seduction by Luke of a consenting Laura. This revision stood for nearly 20 years, until the "reality" of the rape was dealt with in the context of a story involving Luke and Laura's now-grown son. That the creators and many viewers were willing to embrace the couple despite the rape speaks to the danger that such chemistry can lead us to ignore the problematic realities of a couple's story. While I appreciate Nochimson's attempt to point to the progressive potential of what are often regarded as regressive texts, her study would be well-served by examining the possibility that chemistry can often serve the very ideology she claims it subverts.

Overall, Nochimson writes eloquently of the films and stars in her study, and her thesis is intriguing. She draws on a range of popular and archival historical sources, and ably synthesizes textual analysis with extra-textual information. I still have questions, however, about the theoretical basis of her arguments. She draws on neuroscientific research to argue for a "form of chemistry that works quite independent of ideology" by speaking to the "subcortical, preconscious mind" (21, 22). This may not be the place to debate the findings of neuroscience, and I lack the background to do so. It seems to me, however, that Nochimson's notion of the "raw, non-ideological image" comes close to Barthes's "denotative image," that image devoid of any meaning but itself. However, even Barthes notes that the pure denotative image is a near impossibility; images are always already infused with meaning. While Nochimson also concedes that no image can be without some kind of predetermined meaning, she argues that the Synergistic Couple "comes as close as we can ever come to infusing an uncoded experience into the meaning of the Hollywood movie" (21). Even if these images do provide an initial, uncoded jolt, we still make sense of them through established paradigms—paradigms largely based on conservative, patriarchal ideology.

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Writing with Light

Part One: The Light

By Vittorio Storaro. Martellago, Italy: Aperture/Accademia dell'Immagine, 2002. $100.00.

Volume One of Storaro's ambitious three-part work on cinematography ostensibly deals with light as an element of cinematic practice, but more truly attempts to lay out, in particularly Romantic and allegorical terms, a philosophy of light itself and a definition of his relationship to it. Aperture has clearly gone all out to present Storaro's ideas in the most beautiful possible way, and, as is usual for them, the book is well designed and expertly printed. Carefully chosen film stills from his early period (ranging from *Youthful Youthful* [1968] to *Apocalypse Now* [1976]) have been coupled with an interesting assortment of images of paintings and other graphic works, and through this arrangement one sees very clearly Storaro's formal and aesthetic relationship to the art of the past, especially in terms of color theory and the use of shadow to articulate both photographic and thematic depth. This visual association adds greatly to the overall complexity of the project, which, again, is primarily Romantic philosophy. It should be made clear up front that Storaro is not teaching cinematography through this text, and readers expecting something along the lines of John Alton's classic primer *Painting with Light* will be disappointed.

The book is divided into three sections with a biography appended at the end. The first section, called "The Loss of Innocence," introduces us to the Romantic, cosmological nature of Storaro's argument. We are asked to conceive of him as a sort of Child of the Light, a figure out of Romantic legend whose first glimpse of the world is remembered and articulated as the entry into art. A few paragraphs from the beginning will give a sense of the style and nature of the (otherwise hard to describe) concept:

> Energy vibrant with emotion, as visible energy is, appeared before me as soon as I opened my eyes for the first time; the impact was so strong that I think I actually cried out in pain; then I think I attempted, slowly, to emerge from the darkness whence I came to try and understand those still indistinct forms that were moving—although I no longer knew whether these were in front of me or within. I like to imagine that there was a time—and I think I was rather impatient with time then—when I used to kick in my cradle, believing that I was the protagonist of that scene from life around me which, with each cry, was more and more clearly, distinctly defined in an almost still IMAGE of reality that enveloped me and was imprinted on the retina of my eyes that opened wider and wider with surprise.
>
> When LIGHT came into contact with primeval darkness it set in motion a physical and chemical process that also impinged on my body; it was as if I could feel the Light itself, as well as the milk from my mother's breast, nourishing all those tiny particles that composed me. The virgin darkness having been penetrated, I had no choice but to try to understand the nature of such a violent act and what caused it: LIGHT. This meant beginning with the small portion of MATTER that was me, and crawling on all fours towards the primary source itself: ENERGY.

This story goes on to involve our protagonist attempting to move from the Darkness to the Light, encountering along the way Matter (in the form of a breast as the union of Light and Energy). It also involves Innocence (a remote Past of being) moving through Penumbra toward the Future and a kind of Equilibrium: "a maturity to attain; a Light to reach; an Energy to unite collectively, once again, with so many other ENERGIES." During the journey, Shadow becomes Storaro's first real companion (and is gendered as female), and is an unconscious aspect of Self, the supportive function that makes possible a proper kind of maturing into artistry.

The whole prelude to the book continues this autobiographical Romantic allegory, some of the main characters of which become the key players in the second, developmental section. We see Storaro discover color harmony as an aspect of the relationship between himself and his children, who represent the "RED—GREEN—BLUE, which have always composed WHITE LIGHT." He begins to elaborate on his philosophy of color, for which he is famous, but the ideas are only fragmentary and intriguing, and thereby frustrating, as are most of the concepts in the book.

Section Two is broken up into a series of mini-essays that attempt to systematize some of the ideas that arise out of the allegory. There are chapters on Shadow, Penumbra, Light (which is further divided into Punctiform Light, Multiform Light, Natural Light, and Artificial Light), as well as The Sun, The Moon, and The Infinite. These mini-essays are more coherent than the exposition in the prologue, but they still read a little bit like Aleister Crowley. For instance, we see Shadow (as Darkness) as the beginning of everything along with Light, its progenitor. It is mysterious, the Unconscious, the mirror of the SELF, that which "spurs us to follow continually the path toward Illumination, EVOLUTION." Penumbra is described as "the intermediate space between Life and Death," a "vast luminosity [that] makes everything 'serene.' Creating the feeling of an UNCONSCIOUS that is continually being illuminated, of SHADE that has never been completely separated from its opposite, LIGHT."

These ideas are, of course, relevant to film and to cinematography, to life, the universe, and everything, but they need elaboration into a specific apparatus for them to come to fruition. Unfortunately, Storaro never gives us that systematic discussion, never comes down to earth long enough for us to see the meaning of these generalities in his work. Storaro is clearly one of the world's great cinematographers, and so one would like a clear exposition of his ideas. And I

mean "clear" in many possible ways: straightforward and precise, fluid and allusive, deeply philosophical . . . all these are wonderful when they open doors on understanding. This reader at least left the second section of Storaro's book wishing a strong-willed editor had asked some pointed questions. For instance: What exactly is the relationship between shadow, penumbra, and light (without capitalization) and how does this relationship play itself out in your work? What exactly is your philosophy of color, and how does its symbolism enter into your work? Could you talk about the relationships between the various forms of light in your work? And so on.

The third section of the book focuses on the early films in Storaro's now long and important career. It follows the same methodology as the first two, so there is no need to belabor the points already made.

On the other hand, the book is fully and magnificently illustrated, so as a coffee-table feast for the imagination it works very well. The first two illustrations we encounter are Grünewald's *Resurrection* and Blake's *Newton,* and looking at them one sees into an older world's understanding of the nature of light and being and begins to see some of the influences that have led Storaro not only to the ideas he addresses in his book, but also to his justly celebrated cinematography. The concepts of light and shadow and penumbra that fail to emerge from the clouds of words come into bright focus in the illustrations. In the Grünewald, for instance, Christ's head merges with the light of a halo so large it might as well be the sun, and the transitions from light through penumbra to darkness develop a sense of potential communion through all the universe, a possibility of joining in the experience of the ideal through Christ that definitely percolates through Storaro's words and into his own art, also carefully and finely presented. One might look for instance at the still from *Giordano Bruno* on page 76 and back to the Grünewald and begin to see far more than the words alone suggest.

The art selections here thus open onto possibilities for greater understanding that the words alone leave clouded in a sort of mist. And these possibilities enlighten Storaro's work in more complex ways than one might at first think. For instance, when one looks at the illustrations of Vermeer or Caravaggio, the lighting influences leap off the page, but Storaro is more than a formalist copier: his work reflects its own deep understanding of color and meaning, shape and definition of character, so one begins to see the continuum out of which he sees himself as emerging. Interestingly, and certainly not surprisingly, he does not see himself as emerging from a cinematic frame of reference. Instead he looks back to the old masters and to many intriguing new ones as well—Ben Shahn, for instance. From this association many wonderful things emerge.

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